

An Argument for Proactive Attention to Affective Concerns of Gifted Adolescents

Jean Sunde Peterson
Purdue University

To meet affective needs of gifted adolescents, teachers in gifted education can avail themselves of the expertise and resources of school counselors who, especially in recent decades, have been trained to create and implement prevention-oriented, developmental guidance programs. This article provides information about what counselors can offer to gifted adolescents and their teachers, including affective curricula, training in active listening, and cofacilitation of discussion groups. Other strategies for addressing social and emotional concerns in programs are also presented.

Reactive attention to social and emotional concerns of gifted adolescents is often the only attention those concerns receive in schools. When school personnel see behaviors suggesting that a gifted student has an eating disorder or is obsessive-compulsive, schizophrenic, deficient in attention, oppositional, or depressed and suicidal, they are likely to contact the school counselor. The counselor then meets with the student, alerts the student's parents if warranted, offers guidance, and follows established protocols. The student is likely to see a mental health or medical professional. The system has reacted. Prior to crises or clear threats to well-being, however, schools often pay little attention to the social and emotional concerns of gifted adolescents. Proactive attention to affective issues usually does not exist.

Some scholars concerned with affective aspects of giftedness have focused on mental health issues in general (Gallucci, 1988; Neihart, 1998; Schmidt, 1987) or have given specific attention to perfectionism (Parker, 1997; Schuler, 2001), depression (Jackson, 1998), suicide (Dixon & Scheckel, 1996; Gust-Brey & Cross, 1999), eating disorders, or response to trauma (Peterson, 2002b). Peterson and Rischar (2000) studied the social and emotional impact of being gay in the school context. Dabrowski's (1964) concept of positive disintegration gives attention to significant emotional upheaval, while recognizing its function in movement

toward higher levels of personal development. There has been less scholarly attention to *preventing* social and emotional distress (e.g., Clark & Dixon, 1997; Delisle, 1988; Harmon & Ford, 2001; Peterson, 1990; Schmidt, 1987) or developing strategies that "mediate the negative consequences of excellence" (Plucker & Levy, 2001, p. 76), even though Colangelo and Zaffran (1979) argued convincingly more than two decades ago for attention to mental health concerns through developmental and differentiated guidance for gifted students.

Likewise, programs for gifted students usually do not include attention to the prevention of social and emotional difficulties, although there is a lack of empirical evidence to support that assertion. In contrast, prevention is currently basic to the training of school counselors. It will be the contention here that not only can school counselors work with gifted education teachers to prevent problems in gifted students, but gifted education teachers can also make use of the prevention-oriented curricula available to school counselors at all school levels.

The purpose of this article is to help teachers of gifted students understand what they can do to address affective issues of gifted adolescents proactively. This article will describe strategies for incorporating prevention-oriented curricula into programs for gifted students, in addition to offering guidelines for one-on-one communication about affective concerns. The

discussion will begin with a brief historical perspective of prevention-oriented school counseling, followed by a description of the proactive, preventive work school counselors are currently trained to do, which offers curricular models for gifted education at all grade levels. By formally including proactive attention to social and emotional concerns, programs for the gifted can help to prevent social and emotional difficulties and promote healthy development of high-ability students.

A New Breed of School Counselors: A Historical Perspective

The lack of attention to prevention in the education of gifted students is not unlike the similar absence of concern for children and adolescents in the general population until situations demand intervention. Only in recent decades have schools begun to emphasize proactive, preventive attention to affective concerns.

In the 1960s, when National Defense Education Act amendments extended training for school counselors to include the elementary level, counselors for young children began to develop developmental guidance programs for a broad range of students, not just those in crisis, and moved away from the earlier emphasis on remediation of problems (Dinkmeyer, 1967; Wrenn, 1962). These developmental programs emphasized the prevention of problems (Zaccaria, 1969).

Since the 1970s, developmental guidance models have promoted large- and small-group counseling for children (Dinkmeyer, 1971; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000), in addition to curricula focusing on career development, self-management, decision making, and coping with crises. Large-group interventions usually occur in classrooms, with emphasis on the prevention of interpersonal difficulties that might affect school performance. Small groups focus on common developmental tasks or target students who are perceived to be at risk for developing or increasing developmental problems. Sometimes, the term *prevention* is used instead of *developmental* to describe such programming, since it is designed to prevent problems and prevent existing problems from worsening, in addition to enhancing individual development (Baker, 2000).

In broad terms, the field of counseling is distinguished by its emphasis on strengths rather than pathology, and on a collaborative, rather than hierarchical, counselor-client relationship. School counselors function in these modes, as well. However, the prevention dimension of their training generally distinguishes school counselors from other mental health and social service professionals.

Unfortunately, many counselors do not actively clarify their roles in schools and in the community (Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999). Consequently, teachers, administrators,

and the general public may not be aware of what recently trained school counselors can offer, including what they can offer to gifted students and gifted education personnel. A discussion of school counselor preparation follows in order to raise awareness of their potential contribution to gifted education.

School Counselor Preparation

The majority of courses in master's-level school counseling programs are the same as those in mental health counseling programs. Students take courses in ethical and legal issues, human development, cultural and ethnic concerns, theory related to counseling and career development, techniques related to counseling individuals and groups, and assessment. Some preparatory programs require specific courses in program development, consultation, and family systems and offer electives in specific areas such as substance abuse, eating disorders, play therapy, and counseling gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. School counselors often deal with students with serious issues and in difficult circumstances, and their graduate courses prepare them to work with those individuals. However, given their time constraints and student-counselor ratios that average 500:1 (American Counseling Association, 2001), school counselors are likely to refer students with the most serious problems to other professionals.

Currently, the emphasis in school counseling is on "developmental guidance" throughout the school years (Paisley, 2001). That is, counselors focus on helping students develop in positive and appropriate ways using proactive, prevention-oriented, developmentally appropriate counseling curricula. Especially at the elementary level, innovative materials have been developed for whole-classroom and small-group interventions geared to prevention (e.g., Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1982; Holland, 1996; Kaufman & Raphael, 1999; Landy, 1998; Vernon, 2001). Similar materials are available at the secondary level (e.g., Peterson, 1993a, 1995; Vernon, 1989, 2001).

All of this is not to suggest that all school counselors currently practice according to these trends. Many, particularly in high schools, have yet to move boldly into small- and large-group prevention-oriented directions (Myrick, 1997). Especially at that level, counselors may be burdened with duties inappropriate to their professional training. In addition, except for crisis response, their "counseling" may be conceptualized by themselves, fellow educators, and even their students as largely clerical and administrative (Hutchinson & Reagan, 1989). Even their administrators may be unaware of the counselors' special expertise and may also be reluctant to change the counselors' job descriptions, which may seem advantageous to administrators. Those issues deserve a separate discussion and will not be the focus here, although they may

explain why schools differ regarding what school counselors can provide for gifted students. Rather, the focus will now shift to a consideration of the affective needs of gifted students and responsive services.

A Perspective on the Affective Needs of Gifted Students

It is difficult to determine how much attention to gifted students is included in the preparation of school counselors. Highly able students are not usually seen as a "special needs" population. Giftedness may receive the same small amount of attention that learning disabilities, attention-deficit disorder, and substance abuse receive in school counseling preparation, but also may receive no attention at all.

It is beneficial when school counselors perceive that gifted students need the same proactive, prevention-oriented services that others in a school system need. Undoubtedly, those counselors who feel an affinity with high-ability students are more likely to want to work with them. However, in situations where school counselors do not acknowledge that gifted students have social and emotional concerns or that those concerns demand their involvement as counselors, a gifted education teacher may need to not only educate the school counselor by sharing professional articles and pertinent conference information, but also to incorporate affective components into the gifted education curriculum.

Whether or not an affective curriculum is incorporated into a program, the gifted education teacher is often perceived as being able to understand concerns related to giftedness. After all, advocacy is assumed to be one function of the gifted program, and the teacher is in regular contact with gifted students. Because of these perceptions, the teacher needs to be prepared to hear about personal issues, both related and unrelated to school, while being aware that gifted adolescents often are not open about social and emotional concerns (Peterson, 1990, 2002).

Gifted adolescents are certainly not exempt from personal difficulties, and research has shown that the incidence of psychopathology in those with high ability is at least comparable to that in the general population (Gallucci, 1988). In fact, many of their stressors are not unique to gifted individuals, although their intensity and sensitivity (Lovecky, 1992) may contribute to problematic responses to stressors such as the following:

- Their parents may separate, divorce, remarry, and produce blended families with altered roles, adjusted family hierarchies, and new "birth order."
- People close to them die, are terminally ill, move away, or turn away.
- Their families relocate (Plucker & Yecke, 1999).

- Their parents may abuse substances (Peterson, 1997), be workaholics, be depressed, or "abandon" them in still other ways.
- They may have violent parents and difficult sibling relationships (Peterson, 2001b, 2001c), as well as a negative peer group and a difficult environment (Hébert, 2001).
- They may experience trauma, including sexual and other kinds of abuse (Peterson, 2001b), debilitating accidents and illnesses, and other troubling events (Peterson, 1997, 2000a, 2001b).
- Their race, culture, socioeconomic status (Harmon & Ford, 2001; Hébert & Beardsley, 2001), or sexual orientation (Peterson & Rischar, 2000) may contribute to intrapersonal and interpersonal difficulties.
- Personality factors may interfere with ease in school (Ford, 1996; Seeley, 1993). They also may have a biochemical predisposition to a psychological disorder (Penzel, 2000). Predisposed or not, they may be depressed (Jackson, 1998).

Other potential stressors may indeed be related to giftedness:

- They may be teased and bullied at home or at school, uniquely vulnerable because of talents and interests (Peterson & Ray, 2002). These and other experiences may contribute to rage and violence (Cross, 2001; PBS Online & SGBH/Frontline, 2001).
- They may feel isolated (Plucker & Levy, 2001) because of a pervasive sense of "differentness," the stigma of giftedness (Coleman & Cross, 2001), or significant adults' indifference (Peterson, 2001b).
- They may be self-critical and perfectionistic, fearful of mistakes (Schuler, 2001) and of failure, with anxiety about the future (Peterson, 1990).
- Their intensity and internal asynchronies may contribute to stressful environmental interactions (Neihart, 2001).

In short, a multitude of situations or conditions may affect a gifted student's ability to concentrate on schoolwork, to interact effectively and comfortably with peers and teachers, and to maintain good physical and emotional health. In some cases, high achievement and demonstrations of great talent may mask great distress (Peterson, 1993b, 2000, 2002b). Their needs are often unrecognized and unmet (Robinson, 2001).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many gifted adolescents believe that school counselors are available and appropriate for others, but not for them (Peterson, 1990). In the view of many who are high-functioning, the "other kids" are those "in trouble" or "with problems"; in the view of high-ability students who feel disenfranchised because of socioeconomic status or lack of school success, "other kids" are those who are commended for successes, seek scholarships, and need assistance

with college applications. Gifted achievers and underachievers alike may also believe that their teachers, coaches, and even parents do not recognize their affective needs, emphasizing academic and talent development instead. Those adults may send the message that gifted students need to “experience disappointment” and do not need the same level of emotional support as their less-endowed siblings or age peers (Peterson, 2002b). The sensitivity and intensity that have long been associated with giftedness (Piechowski, 1979), coupled with gifted individuals’ silence when in distress (Peterson, 2002a), suggest that gifted students are indeed at risk for personal and interpersonal problems, perhaps in ways that are unique to high-ability populations.

There is no available information regarding how much attention programs for gifted students give to affective concerns, although Clark (2000) reported that 8 of 14 countries that responded to a *World Gifted* survey do provide programs in the area of social/emotional development. The United States was not among those eight. In this author’s view, based on feedback to presentations at gifted education conferences and during consultation with schools, few programs formally and intentionally include such attention. Several factors may contribute to this lack of attention to social and emotional concerns. Programs may be severely understaffed, with teachers sometimes responsible for more than one school site. Time constraints may seem to preclude “extras,” including attention to the affective. Preparation of gifted education teachers may include a course focusing on social and emotional concerns, but may focus mostly on school environments that are unreceptive and unresponsive to gifted students or curricula that are not accommodating (cf. Lubinski & Benbow, 2000). Such a course may discuss interpersonal issues related to giftedness (cf. Plucker & Levy, 2001; Silverman, 1993), but may not offer strategies for addressing those concerns in programs. In short, programs for gifted students are not likely to attend regularly and intentionally to the nonacademic development of students.

“Normal development” for adolescents includes developing identity, moving toward autonomy, establishing a mature relationship, and exploring career direction (Havighurst, 1972). However, in people with high ability, the period of active exploration of identity is likely to be pronounced (Erikson, 1968), and adolescents who are actively engaged in identity exploration are more likely than others to be in conflict with parents and other authority figures (Kidwell, Dunham, Bacho, Pastorino, & Portes, 1995). Both career indecision (Kerr, 1991; Rysiew, Shore, & Leeb, 1999) and intense commitment to career development (Plucker & Levy, 2001) may contribute to high stress for gifted adolescents. Unfortunately, because their training has not yet incorporated the concept of nonuniversal development, which challenges generalized developmental models (Feldman & Fowler, 1998), school coun-

selors may be unaware of not only the nature and needs of gifted students, but also of their potential for atypical development (cf. Coleman & Cross, 2001). In fact, developmental asynchrony (e.g., disparity among intellectual, physical, social, and emotional developmental levels) is routinely associated with giftedness (Silverman, 2001).

All children and adolescents, including all who are gifted, face developmental challenges. However, educators often give less attention to the developmental concerns of highly able individuals than they give to those who are less able. Bright and talented students may be perceived as not needing help (Peterson, 2002b), particularly with normal developmental concerns. In fact, they may be seen as not “normal” at all (Cross, Coleman, & Stewart, 1993). School personnel may assume that gifted adolescents are able to meet personal challenges by applying their abilities or that they simply have no aspects of self other than talents and performance.

Strategies for Proactively Addressing Affective Concerns

What can gifted education coordinators and teachers do to address the affective concerns of secondary gifted students proactively in order to prevent serious social and emotional problems later or to prevent existing problems from worsening? How can interventions be incorporated into programs for the gifted?

Since it is often unacceptable to pull students out of class, middle and high schools usually offer more logistical challenges than do earlier grade levels for school counselors who want to develop proactive approaches. The same resistance to pull-out services may be true for gifted education programs. However, creative use of nonclass times may allow attention to prevention. Meeting over lunch—and “borrowing” 15 minutes from the preceding or following class period—provides adequate time for discussion. Meeting during regularly scheduled advisor-advisee, “homeroom,” or “community” times can sometimes be arranged, again perhaps by arranging extra minutes. Scheduling gifted students together daily for these periods for an entire semester is also sometimes possible, especially if administrators can be convinced that social and emotional concerns will be a weekly focus and that grouping homogeneously by ability is important for comfort and trust. For nonbussed students, activities may be arranged before or after school (Peterson, 1996).

Using Available Models

Gifted education teachers do not have to reinvent the wheel when including proactive attention to social and emo-

tional concerns in their programs. Since examples of affective materials for gifted students are rare in the literature (e.g., Milne & Reis, 2000), school counselors should be seen as a primary resource at all grade levels, since they are steeped in prevention-oriented curricula that are appropriate or can be easily adapted for gifted students. Particularly if counselors in their schools are not regularly developing and employing such materials, gifted education teachers can ask them for catalogs that include resources appropriate for small groups of gifted students. These materials are usually somewhat structured, offering a discussion focus with accompanying writing and discussion activities (e.g., Peterson, 1993a, 1995). Such structure allows noncounselors to maintain a moderate level of control of discussions and to avoid moving into therapy, for which they are not trained.

Counseling offers models of listening behaviors, as well. Whether or not the discussions are structured, active listening skills are important. When working with individuals or groups, the most rudimentary counseling skills involve the following:

- placing the emphasis on listening, rather than questioning, because the latter controls conversations and discussions and often reflects the questioner's agenda, not the needs of the speaker;
- placing the emphasis on listening, rather than informing (i.e., from information *giving* to information *receiving*), a change that may be difficult for teachers;
- "attending" to the speaker—giving undivided attention, giving eye contact, and responding nonverbally to what is said (e.g., with nods and an expressive face);
- paying attention to feelings being conveyed and validating those feelings (e.g., "I can hear how *frustrated* you are"; "I can see you were *sad* to hear that");
- using paraphrases and summaries to show that the listener has been paying attention (e.g., "Let me see if I've got this right. You were saying that you . . .");
- resisting the urge to "fix" or give advice to the speaker, because feeling pressure to "fix" or "advise" puts an unnecessary burden on the listener and also takes away opportunities for the speaker to explore feelings and options, solve his or her own problems, and become able to solve future problems without having to seek help;
- resisting the urge to self-disclose, since self-disclosure takes attention away from the speaker and is usually not as effective as a speaker might think;
- recognizing that it is important to "enter the personal world" of those who are under stress, facing difficult decisions, or having difficulty with developmental challenges—and to enter nonjudgmentally;
- recognizing that being heard may be more helpful than "being fixed"; and
- recognizing that the listener needs to be "taught" by the speaker, since no listener can know the thoughts and feelings of another unless the speaker has the opportunity to share them.

Active listening skills can also be taught to gifted adolescents themselves for the benefit of their present and future relationships.

Discussion Groups

A gifted education teacher might ask a school counselor to cofacilitate a small group of gifted students so that he or she might be able to observe techniques and develop skills alongside someone especially trained in group work. School counselors can be encouraged to conduct a discussion group alone for gifted students as well, emphasizing that grouping by both age and ability level is important for discussion of social and emotional concerns (Peterson, 1995). An indirect benefit of that involvement is the group leaders' enhanced awareness of gifted students' social and emotional concerns.

This writer discovered, through more than 1,000 group sessions with gifted high school students (Peterson, 1990), that many do not trust that their nongifted age peers can understand their social and emotional concerns. In addition, most of the students indicated that they did not readily share elsewhere their thoughts about developmental challenges, expectations from self and others, disappointments, frustrations, fears, expectations, and sadness. Many had developed a façade of invulnerability, which helped to protect their bright and successful image in school and at home. It was not easy for them to reveal doubts, embarrassments, shame, and feelings of awkwardness. They were also afraid that their questions about relationships, drugs, and the "how-to" of college would sound "dumb." The groups gave them opportunity to connect with other highly able individuals, and most students gradually relaxed and shared their vulnerabilities. Those who did not share easily still attended the groups regularly and, at the end of the experience, wrote that they had gained a great deal by listening to others. Some revealed that the groups had helped them through difficult times even though no one at school or in the groups had been aware of their difficulties.

Discussion groups geared to social and emotional concerns can accommodate the entire range of students with high ability (i.e., achievers and underachievers, students from mainstream and other cultural backgrounds, superstars and students on the social fringe, risk takers and risk avoiders, and students from the entire socioeconomic range). In fact, discussion groups may be the *only* program component that can do this. In addition to providing a place of comfort, the groups can serve to affirm personal strengths, an important element in the prevention of social and emotional problems during adolescence, especially

for those who are experiencing severe difficulties (Peterson, 2001a) or whose cultural values are at odds with the culture of the school (Harmon & Ford, 2001; Peterson, 1999). Discussion groups can provide additional prevention-oriented benefits:

1. helping students to discover commonalities with others, thereby lessening feelings of isolation and loneliness;
2. helping students feel affirmed for their ability, even when they are not successful or productive in school, and while they may be experiencing episodic underachievement (Peterson & Colangelo, 1996);
3. helping students develop skills in articulating social and emotional concerns, which can benefit their personal relationships during adolescence and adulthood;
4. helping students sort out stressors, potentially avoiding development of serious mental health concerns later; and
5. providing students with information about substance use and abuse, depression and suicidal ideation, eating disorders, various forms of abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder to fill in critical gaps in information about self-care or to correct misinformation.

Group Projects

Social and emotional needs can be met more indirectly and informally, as well. All program components that involve groups are inherently social, whether students come together to prepare for academic competitions, work on research projects, or venture beyond the regular curriculum in other ways. Gifted education teachers can purposefully incorporate time for “play” and socializing into such endeavors, providing opportunity for students to become acquainted in new ways.

Speakers

Speakers from nearby universities, from medical centers, and from mental health agencies might be invited to speak to small or large groups of gifted students during the school day or after school about social and emotional concerns. This writer, during her tenure as a high school gifted education teacher in an urban setting, regularly arranged an after-school lecture series using the resources just listed, open to anyone in the school who had an interest in the topics. Though some series were clearly meant to provide advanced academic content (e.g., Constitutional law; futuristic visions of immunology, reproductive technology, and endocrinology; urban planning; comparative religions), other series focused on affective concerns (e.g., adolescent depression, teenage pregnancy, sexuality, addiction, coping with stress, eating disorders, perfectionism, and relationship violence). Classroom teachers offered extra

credit to students who attended lectures that related to their content areas, reflecting collaboration between gifted education and the regular curriculum. The quality and intellectual level were not compromised by opening these lectures to the entire student body.

Counselors, social workers, and psychologists can also be invited to speak to small or large groups as single events. It has been this writer's experience that high school students are interested in learning about themselves and are eager to know what therapists see in adolescent clients and what these professionals can offer as guidance. Such speakers can present their views of the “burdens of capability” (Peterson, 1998; Plucker & Levy, 2001).

Panels

Panels of first-year college students home for Thanksgiving break can contribute valuable information about adjusting to college academic and social environments, including dealing with time and money management, homesickness, roommates, finding people to eat with, maintaining good physical and emotional health, communicating with professors, being tested less frequently than in high school, and finding meaningful nonacademic activities (Peterson, 2000b). Panels of successful, productive adults who were high-ability underachievers, struggled with learning disabilities, or battled authority figures as adolescents can give hope to gifted secondary students who are discouraged, lack motivation, or are sabotaging their own progress.

Parent Groups

Parent support groups, large or small, can be organized for the purpose of enhancing the family, social, and emotional lives of gifted adolescents. Parents can learn to be proactive in helping their adolescents develop in healthy ways. Raising parents' awareness with information pertinent to social and emotional development is one strategy, as well as focusing on family problem solving or parent-adolescent communication. Another strategy is to sustain group focus on a particular concern (e.g., learning disabilities in gifted students) for one or more meetings. Yet another is focusing on one or more of the topics mentioned in regard to speakers and panels above, encouraging those with shared concerns to form networks for mutual support. Group meetings can also be open-ended, with issues raised by those attending. These groups might be cofacilitated with a school counselor who has expertise in group communication. Counselors can also be invited to speak to parent groups about affective concerns, including the need for parents to be active listeners. In fact, counselors might offer a parent workshop on listening skills.

Program Components Geared to Career Development

Career development should be part of the school guidance curriculum at all levels, addressed in ways that are developmentally appropriate. Certainly for gifted adolescents, career units should go beyond interests and academic strengths and, in addition, focus on personal characteristics, personal values, and personal fit in various career environments. Gifted education teachers can work independently or with the school counselor to offer career-related program options geared specifically to students with high ability. The emphasis need not be on “deciding,” but rather on becoming more aware of personal needs as related to potential career contexts. For example, helping students to arrange a whole-day career shadowing experience can be developmentally valuable. They can participate in both the mundane and the dramatic aspects of the work, experience both physical and emotional stressors related to the career, and might be able to get a sense of their own fit with the types of personalities found in the field.

In terms of fit, many students who perform well in math and science may not have a clear vision of what engineering entails, and yet they may be strongly encouraged by family and teachers to pursue that field. Field trips, even in cities of modest size, can acquaint students with engineering—civil, aeronautical, mechanical, chemical, electrical, and architectural. Similarly, field trips with small groups of interested students to the offices of commercial artists, actuaries, accountants, lawyers, and judges can help to correct stereotypes or mistaken impressions formed by the media. A visit to a hospital might include a brief panel discussion in a conference room by a group of willing doctors, and panels of professionals who are applying science majors (e.g., a hazardous waste expert, a water treatment facility director, a waste management expert) might be arranged at school. Applications of a communications major can be represented on a panel (e.g., political aides, media figures, public relations professionals). Field trips to nearby cities where panels or site visits have been arranged can give rural students a realistic sense of various careers not represented in their communities.

Finally, panels of adults who have made more than two career changes can be arranged to show that one does not have to have “perfect” career direction at a young age and that individuals can make changes later. In fact, when young adolescents feel paralyzed by outside pressures to decide on a career direction, especially one perceived to be appropriate for “someone with great potential,” hearing from a gifted education teacher, school counselor, or panelist that one does not need to know direction while still in high school can be reassuring. Career development components in programs for gifted adolescents should be seen as opportunities to *explore* careers. No high school is able to acquaint its students with all career pos-

sibilities, certainly not meaningfully. An inspiring college professor, a chance conversation with a seatmate on an airplane, a college internship adventure, or a new friend might contribute to direction in ways never imagined during adolescence. Premature foreclosure on direction, especially when identity is not firm and self-awareness is not well developed, can create difficulties later. Many gifted high school graduates change majors more than once (Peterson, 2000a).

Contributing Positively to the School Climate

School counselors are currently being encouraged to be agents of change, integral to school reform and potentially changing systems that impact children’s lives negatively (House & Martin, 1998). Gifted education teachers can be change agents as well, even though some may perceive that their work is peripheral, dealing with only a small percentage of the student population. In reality, gifted education teachers can help to create a school climate that values learning, many kinds of intelligence, and diversity, and does not tolerate aggression and hostility.

First, an affective emphasis draws attention to the fact that gifted students may have special developmental needs and may be “burdened” by their abilities, their intensities, and their own and others’ expectations. Developing that posture in the gifted education program is a first step toward affecting the school climate positively for gifted students and possibly for others as well, since interest in affective concerns may increase generally. Another indirect benefit is that a social and emotional focus helps to combat negative perceptions of gifted education, including that it is unjustified, since understandable *needs* are emphasized.

Second, opening program components such as lectures to the entire school body provides opportunities for the enrichment of all students and represents professional collaboration. In addition, such programming demonstrates to the student body that “extra learning” is acceptable and desirable. Having some lectures focus on affective concerns associates high ability with interest in social and emotional issues and may therefore challenge stereotypes of both gifted students and programs. Fliers advertising lectures and other open programs can in themselves contribute to an atmosphere of learning, including learning about the self. There are usually few or no other opportunities for the student body to have these experiences.

Third, discussion groups can play a part in generating a positive school climate. When dealing with social and emotional issues, the social hierarchy fades. Gifted students quickly realize that stellar achievement does not necessarily mean being able to articulate personal concerns. The most assertive debaters are not necessarily the most eloquent in these unique discussion groups. Highly verbal, competitive individuals might even

find that leaving “global issues” out of the discussions creates discomfort. The result may be less arrogant behavior at school, and, in turn, more accommodation by teachers, less hostility from peers, and increased harmony among all students.

Last, by sharing information about general concerns related to giftedness with school counselors, teachers, and administrators, gifted education teachers raise others’ awareness of the social and emotional needs of gifted students. A close working relationship between gifted education teachers and school counselors can also mean collaboration regarding school interventions for gifted students in distress or referrals to outside agencies.

Conclusion

The current emphasis in school counselor preparation on prevention and enhancing the development of students of all ages offers a framework for gifted education programs seeking to address the affective needs of students. Gifted students, like other students, face developmental challenges. They can benefit from opportunities to learn about development and gain skills in articulating concerns and coping with stress. Programs for gifted students can include an affective curriculum, including focused discussion groups, speakers and panels addressing social and emotional concerns, various group-oriented components with intentionally social dimensions, career-development modules, and parent groups geared to improving family communication and raising awareness of social and emotional concerns of gifted individuals. A social/emotional component in a program for the gifted is arguably the most important component and can even be the component of choice when only one program dimension is affordable, since it can accommodate cultural, socio-economic, and motivational diversity.

Gifted education teachers and their programs can also contribute to improving the general school climate. When selected program components are open to the entire student body and when publicity creates interest in learning and gives attention to social and emotional concerns, both gifted and other students benefit.

It is important not to ignore the social and emotional concerns of gifted adolescents, not just to help them navigate typical and atypical developmental challenges, but also because some concerns may develop into significant maladies later. Some diagnosable conditions, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and anorexia nervosa, often manifest themselves during late adolescence (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Gaining skills in articulating concerns and discovering commonalities with peers might be critical to sound mental health for individuals struggling with serious issues. However, what all gifted adolescents can gain from attention to affective con-

cerns can enhance relationships and quality of life across the lifespan, even to the benefit of gifted children not yet born.

References

- American Counseling Association. (2001). *School counseling legislation: June 2001 advocacy update. Briefing Paper*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association Office of Public Policy & Information.
- American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental Disorders (DSM-IV; 4th ed.)*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Baker, S. B. (2000). *School counseling for the twenty-first century*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Ballard, M. B., & Murgatroyd, W. (1999). Defending a vital program: School counselors define their roles. *National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASPP) Bulletin*, 83, 19–26.
- Clark, B. (2000). Building a cross-culture knowledge base—programs and services. *World Gifted*, 19(3), 1, 12–13.
- Clark, J. J., & Dixon, D. N. (1997). The impact of social skills training on self-concept of gifted high school students. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 8, 179–188.
- Colangelo, N., & Zaffran, R. T. (1979). Counseling with gifted and talented students. In N. Colangelo & R. T. Zaffran (Eds.), *New voices in counseling the gifted* (pp. 142–152). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Coleman, L. J., & Cross, T. L. (2001). *Being gifted in school: An introduction to development, guidance, and teaching*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Cross, T. L. (2001, Spring). The rage of gifted students. *Gifted Child Today*, 24(2), 43–45.
- Cross, T. L., Coleman, L. J., & Stewart, R. A. (1993). The social cognition of gifted adolescents: An exploration of the stigma of giftedness paradigm. *Roeper Review*, 16, 37–40.
- Dabrowski, K. (1964). *Positive disintegration*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Delisle, J. (1988, January/February). Striking out: Suicide and the gifted adolescent. *Gifted Child Today*, 11(1), 41–44.
- Dinkmeyer, D. (1967). Elementary school guidance and the classroom teacher. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling*, 1, 15–26.
- Dinkmeyer, D. (1971). *Group approaches to understanding and changing behavior*. Chicago: DePaul University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 049 494)
- Dinkmeyer, D. C., & Dinkmeyer, D., Jr. (1982). *Developing understanding of self and others (DUSO): Kits 1 and 2* (Rev. eds.). Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service. (Original works published 1970 and 1973)

- Dixon, D. N., & Scheckel, J. R. (1996). Gifted adolescent suicide: The empirical base. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education, 7*, 386–392.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Feldman, D. H., & Fowler, R. C. (1998). Second thoughts: A response to the commentaries. *New Ideas in Psychology, 15*, 235–245.
- Ford, D. Y. (1996). *Reversing underachievement among gifted Black students*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gallucci, N. T. (1988). Emotional adjustment of gifted children. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 32*, 273–276.
- Gust-Brey, K., & Cross, T. (1999). An examination of the literature base on the suicidal behaviors of gifted students. *Roeper Review, 22*, 28–35.
- Gysbers, N. C., & Henderson, P. (2000). *Developing and managing your school guidance program* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Harmon, D., & Ford, D. Y. (2001, November). *Dualities of identity: Using bibliotherapy for self understanding*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Gifted Children, Cincinnati, OH.
- Havighurst, R. J. (1972). *Developmental tasks and education* (3rd ed.). New York: McKay.
- Hébert, T. P. (2001). "If I had a new notebook, I know things would change": Bright underachieving young men in urban classrooms. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 45*, 174–194.
- Holland, R. G. (1996). *About me*. Indianapolis: KIDSRIGHTS.
- House, R. M., & Martin, P. J. (1998). Advocating for better futures for all students: A new vision for school counselors. *Education, 119*, 284–291.
- Hutchinson, R. L., & Reagan, C. A. (1989). Problems for which seniors would seek help from school counselors. *School Counselor, 36*, 271–280.
- Jackson, S. P. (1998). Bright star—black sky: A phenomenological study of depression as a window into the psyche of the gifted adolescent. *Roeper Review, 20*, 215–221.
- Kaufman, G., & Raphael, L. (1999). *Stick up for yourself! Every kid's guide to personal power and positive self-esteem*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit.
- Kerr, B. (1991). *A handbook for counseling the gifted and talented*. Alexandria, VA: American Association for Counseling and Development.
- Kidwell, J. S., Dunham, R. M., Bacho, R. A., Pastorino, E., & Portes, P. P. (1995). Adolescent identity exploration: A test of Erickson's theory of transitional crisis. *Adolescence, 30*, 785–837.
- Landy, L. (1998). *Child support through small group counseling*. Indianapolis: KIDSRIGHTS.
- Lovecky, D. V. (1992). Exploring social and emotional aspects of giftedness in children. *Roeper Review, 15*, 18–25.
- Lubinski, D., & Benbow, C. P. (2000). States of excellence. *American Psychologist, 55*, 137–150.
- Milne, H. J., & Reis, S. M. (2000, January/February). Using videotherapy to address the social and emotional needs of gifted children. *Gifted Child Today, 23*(1), 24–29.
- Myrick, R. D. (1997). *Developmental guidance and counseling: A practical approach* (3rd ed.). Minneapolis: Educational Media Corporation.
- Neihart, M. (1998). Creativity, the arts, and madness. *Roeper Review, 21*, 47–50.
- Neihart, M. (2001). Risk and resilience in gifted children: A conceptual framework. In M. Neihart, S. M. Reis, N. M. Robinson, & S. M. Moon (Eds.), *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* (pp. 113–122). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- PBS Online and WGBH/Frontline. (2000, January 1). *The killer at Thurston High*. Retrieved September 20, 2001, from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kinkel/kip>
- Paisley, P. O. (2001). Maintaining and enhancing the developmental focus in school counseling programs. *Professional School Counseling, 4*, 271–277.
- Parker, W. D. (1997). An empirical typology of perfectionism in academically talented children. *American Educational Research Journal, 34*, 545–562.
- Penzel, F. (2000). *Obsessive-compulsive disorders: A complete guide to getting well and staying well*. New York: Oxford.
- Peterson, J. S. (1990, July/August). Noon-hour discussion groups: Dealing with the burdens of capability. *Gifted Child Today, 13*(4), 17–22.
- Peterson, J. S. (1993a). *Talk with teens about self and stress: 50 guided discussions for school and counseling groups*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit.
- Peterson, J. S. (1993b, January/February). What we learned from Genna. *Gifted Child Today, 16*(1), 15–16.
- Peterson, J. S. (1995). *Talk with teens about feelings, family, relationships, and the future. 50 guided discussions for school and counseling groups*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit.
- Peterson, J. S. (1996, July/August). The breakfast club: Poetry and pancakes. *Gifted Child Today Magazine, 19*(4), 16–19, 49.
- Peterson, J. S. (1997). Bright, tough, and resilient—and not in a gifted program. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education, 8*, 121–136.
- Peterson, J. S. (1998). The burdens of capability. *Reclaiming Children & Youth, 6*, 194–198.
- Peterson, J. S. (1999). Gifted—through whose cultural lens? An application of the postpositivistic mode of inquiry. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 22*, 354–383.
- Peterson, J. S. (2000a). A follow-up study of one group of achievers and underachievers four years after high school graduation. *Roeper Review, 22*, 217–224.

- Peterson, J. S. (2000b, March/April). Preparing for college—beyond the “getting-in” part. *Gifted Child Today*, 23(2), 36–41.
- Peterson, J. S. (2001a). Gifted and at risk: Four longitudinal case studies. *Roeper Review*, 24, 31–39.
- Peterson, J. S. (2001b). Successful adults who were adolescent underachievers. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 45, 236–249.
- Peterson, J. S. (2002a). A longitudinal study of post-high-school development in gifted individuals at risk for poor educational outcomes. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 14, 6–18.
- Peterson, J. S. (2002b). *Gifted and traumatized: A developmental case study*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Peterson, J. S., & Colangelo, N. (1996). Gifted achievers and underachievers: A comparison of patterns found in school files. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 74, 399–407.
- Peterson, J. S., & Ray, K. (2002). *Bullying among gifted children: Victims, perpetrators, incidence, and effects*. Manuscript in preparation.
- Peterson, J. S., & Rischar, H. (2000). Gifted and gay: A study of the adolescent experience. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 44, 149–164.
- Piechowski, M. M. (1979). Developmental potential. In N. Colangelo & R. T. Zaffran (Eds.), *New voices in counseling the gifted* (pp. 25–57). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Plucker, J. A., & Levy, J. J. (2001). The downside of being talented. *American Psychologist*, 56, 75–76.
- Plucker, J. A., & Yecke, C. P. (1999). The effect of relocation on gifted students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 43, 95–106.
- Robinson, N. M. (2001). Introduction. In M. Neihart, S. M. Reis, N. M. Robinson, & S. M. Moon (Eds.), *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* (pp. xi–xxiv). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Rysiew, K. J., Shore, B. M., & Leeb, R. T. (1999). Multipotentiality, giftedness, and career choice. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 77, 423–430.
- Schmidt, M. M. (1987). Psychiatric aspects of high giftedness. *Gifted International*, 4(2), 42–50.
- Schuler, P. A. (2001). Perfectionism and the gifted adolescent. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 11, 183–196.
- Seeley, K. R. (1993). Gifted students at risk. In L. K. Silverman (Ed.), *Counseling the gifted and talented* (pp. 263–276). Denver: Love.
- Silverman, L. K. (1993). A developmental model for counseling the gifted. In L. K. Silverman (Ed.), *Counseling the gifted and talented* (pp. 51–78). Denver: Love.
- Silverman, L. K. (2001). Asynchronous development. In M. Neihart, S. M. Reis, N. M. Robinson, & S. M. Moon (Eds.), *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* (pp. 31–37). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Vernon, A. (1989). *Thinking, feeling, behaving: An emotional education curriculum for adolescents. Grades 7–12*. Champagne, IL: Research Press.
- Vernon, A. (2001). *The passport program*. Champagne, IL: Research Press.
- Wrenn, C. G. (1962). *The counselor in a changing world*. Washington, DC: American Personnel and Guidance Association.
- Zaccaria, J. (1969). *Approaches to guidance in contemporary education*. Scranton, PA: International Textbook.

