Preparing School Counselors to Address Concerns Related to Giftedness: A Study of Accredited Counselor Preparation Programs

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Professional school counselors are responsible for serving students across a wide range of cognitive ability, yet counselor educators may not attend to issues related to giftedness, such as how and when developmental phenomena may be experienced by highly able students, and the need to differentiate counseling approaches for this population. This study examined the extent to which CACREP-accredited school counseling programs addressed giftedness, as well as perceived barriers and supports that influenced whether programs included topics related to extreme ability in their preparatory curricula. Findings included that minimal attention was given to the implications of high ability for counseling practice, and that a lack of room in the curriculum, lack of funding, and absence of pertinent, mandated standards were some of the largest barriers to inclusion. Supports in the form of openness to including information, faculty expertise and experience, and perceived need were generally perceived to be low to moderate.

Students whose measured intellectual ability is at least two standard deviations above the mean are labeled gifted in some U.S. school districts (Saunders, 2007). In general, students with high scores on achievement or IQ tests often are eligible for special services (Ford & Grantham, 2003). However, because identification criteria and practices differ among schools and states (Saunders, 2007), for the purposes of this discussion, *gifted* will refer to individuals with outstanding abilities who are capable of high levels of performance in one or more of several domains, generally reflecting the Marland (1972) definition (Public Law 91-230, section 806), which continues to be a commonly used guideline (Stephens & Karnes, 2000).

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Interest in whether there is intentional preparation of counselors to respond to this population led to the study to be presented here, which sought to ascertain the extent to which counselor education programs addressed the overlay of high ability on social, emotional, academic, and career development. When working with counselors-in-training, the first author had noticed a lack of pertinent knowledge and skepticism in many about the notion of special affective needs in gifted individuals. However, she had also noted the positive effects of raised awareness on graduate students' willingness and ability to differentiate counseling approaches for this population. Similarly, at presentations to counselors and K–12 educators on this topic, audience feedback about their previous lack of knowledge and the impact of new awareness also raised concerns that professional preparation for working with high-ability students was inadequate. In addition, audience feedback often reflected an assumption that high ability helps gifted individuals negotiate daily life and developmental challenges without much assistance.

Regardless of school or agency venue and regardless of criteria for identification of giftedness, all professional counselors, including school counselors, undoubtedly interact with highly able individuals. In addition, according to American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2003) standards, professional school counselors have a responsibility to address developmental needs of *all* students, assumedly including those with exceptional intellectual ability. In fact, because of their multifaceted roles in the schools, professional school counselors are uniquely positioned not only to respond to these students' academic, career, and personal/social concerns, but also to help identify gifted students from cultural and socioeconomic groups that are typically underrepresented (Peterson, 2006a). Pertinent scholarly writing supports the idea that gifted children and adolescents need differential counseling approaches (Moon, 2007), including both responsive services and proactive, development-oriented guidance, as advocated by ASCA. Yet studies focusing on special programs and practices for gifted students generally do not discuss implications of findings for school counselors (e.g., Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008; Cross, Speirs Neumeister, & Cassady, 2007; Rogers, 2007).

No previous studies have examined how giftedness is addressed in programs that prepare graduate students to be professional school

counselors. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to ascertain the degree of attention in accredited counselor education programs to preparing counselors to respond appropriately and effectively to needs and concerns of gifted children and adolescents. An additional purpose was to determine perceived barriers to, and support for, attention to giftedness in the education of school counselors.

Findings will be presented after a discussion of literature related to gifted students' social and emotional development, identification, concerns, and pertinent counseling approaches. Given that *ability* and *extreme ability* now appear as variables to consider in counseling practice in the revised Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) standards, this study was timely. Findings have implications for training curriculum.

Review of Literature

A Highly Idiosyncratic Population With Some Common Characteristics

Collectively, gifted youth may not be more likely or unlikely than others to have social and emotional difficulties (Neihart, 1999, 2002a). However, characteristics associated with giftedness, such as psychomotor, intellectual, sensual, emotional, and imaginational overexcitabilities (Piechowski, 1999), may actually be risk factors for poor personal outcomes (Robinson, 2002). Counselors and psychologists who are unfamiliar with literature related to giftedness may inappropriately view some of these characteristics as pathology (Webb et al., 2005). In addition, these professionals may make assumptions without considering that intellectual giftedness, as typically defined, reflects a wide range of measured intelligence—from, for instance, scores of 130 (the beginning of "moderate giftedness") to 180 and above ("profound giftedness") on an individually administered intelligence assessment (Boland & Gross, 2007). Gifted students may therefore differ considerably in psychological and social characteristics (Moon, 2007), varying in *degree* (e.g., of sensitivity) from less able age peers and also among themselves (Mendaglio, 2007). In addition,

and pertinent to counseling needs, some students' giftedness may even co-occur with one or more learning disabilities (Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006).

If educators and counselors base their perceptions of this high-ability population on common positive stereotypes, they may not recognize counseling needs, which then are not likely to be addressed (Robinson, 2002). In addition, gifted students may not express their needs. In their study of gifted students as targets or perpetrators of bullying, Peterson and Ray (2006) found that gifted students often did not ask for help, even when assistance was crucial to their well-being. Peterson and Rischar (2000) drew the same conclusion about students struggling with awareness of homosexual sexual orientation. According to a study of young, profoundly gifted clients in therapy (Jackson & Peterson, 2003), gifted students may fear that mentioning their concerns will simply be "too much" for others—or misunderstood. One clinical description (Peterson, 1990) included a gifted teen's perception that students like her did not have "a right" to approach school counselors, who were perceived to be preoccupied with "problem kids." These findings and perceptions suggest that school counselors need to be informed about and alert to counseling needs of gifted children and adolescents.

Gifted students often present with interests and needs that are different from others in their age group. Educational, career, and talent-development planning was a common concern at one university-based counseling center for gifted children and adolescents (Yoo & Moon, 2006). Hébert and Kelly (2006) noted a need to address career development much earlier in gifted children than in the rest of the school population. In a longitudinal study, Peterson, Duncan, and Canady (2009) found that stress related to high expectations and overinvolvement was a greater concern to high achievers than were challenges associated with unexpected, difficult life events. Depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide among highly gifted youth have also been studied. Cross, Cassady, and Miller (2006) found no higher rates of suicidal ideation when comparing gifted with nongifted students, but, when comparing male and female gifted students, found relatively higher levels among female students with introversion and perceiving personality types. Cassady and Cross (2006) found that factorial representation of suicidal ideation differed between gifted and normal

samples, providing a theoretical base for intervention and assessment of suicide risk.

For several decades, academic underachievement among gifted students has also received considerable attention in the scholarly literature (e.g., Diaz, 1998; Ford, 1996; McCoach & Siegle, 2003; Raph, 1966; Rimm, 2008; Weiss, 1972; Whitmore, 1980). Yet neither extreme achievers nor gifted underachievers may be among the special populations studied during counselor preparation. Similarly, gifted students may be involved with disruptive, self-destructive, or delinquent behavior (cf. Neihart, 2002b), emotional withdrawal, excessive absences and tardiness, and even school dropout (Peterson, 2001). These phenomena, as related to gifted students, have received little attention in literature.

Developmental Differences

Some research findings have suggested a need for counselor educators to include information related to students with disabilities and their parents in counselor preparation curriculum (Milsom, 2002), and indeed some school counseling textbooks devote all, most, or part of a chapter to that population (e.g., Davis, 2005; Erford, 2007; Muro & Kottman, 1995). In contrast, and more frequently, characteristics and needs of gifted students are not mentioned at all (e.g., Baker & Gerler, 2008; Davis, 2005; Gibson & Mitchell, 2008), or are given only 1 to 5 lines (e.g., Brown & Trusty, 2005; Cobia & Henderson, 2007; Erford, 2007) or a paragraph (Sandhu, 2001). Sometimes the few lines are focused on only one concern, such as academic pressure or tracking. This apparent dearth of attention to ability at the upper end of the bell curve when special populations are discussed in foundational material suggests that most counselor preparation programs may not include complex information related to gifted students' development, counseling concerns, and the need for differential approaches.

In general terms, students typically identified as gifted are as different from their average-ability peers in intellectual processing as are the students in the same small percent at the opposite end of the continuum (Peterson, 2006b). As the level of difference from the mean increases, social difficulties also increase. A profoundly gifted child may have no intellectual peers at school or in the community (Boland

& Gross, 2007). As early as kindergarten, highly able children may find school unreceptive to their abilities (Rimm, 2008). Even at less extreme levels of intellectual ability, gifted students may have a "mismatch with educational environments that are not responsive to the pace and level of gifted students' learning and thinking" (Robinson, 2002, p. xiv), and a poor fit may increase during the school years.

Gifted individuals face the same developmental challenges as their less able age peers (e.g., issues related to identity and differentiation, career direction, peer relationships, and confidence in competence). However, characteristics associated with giftedness in the clinical and research literature, such as high levels of sensitivity (Mendaglio, 2007), intensity, and perceptiveness (Lovecky, 1992), may make the subjective *experience* of meeting normal developmental challenges qualitatively different from others' experience and also contribute to difficulties with accomplishing developmental tasks. Intense feelings during puberty, for example, may be frightening, challenging the sense of environmental control that high verbal ability and intellect normally afford (Peterson, 2006a). Sensitivities may also contribute to intense responses to negative life events and situations, such as serious illness, death of someone close, or a sibling's leaving for college (Peterson et al., 2009). Perfectionism and self-criticism may interfere with well-being (Schuler, 1997). Problematic behavior might preclude being referred by teachers for consideration for special programs, according to Peterson and Margolin's (1997) study of the language of teachers making recommendations for a program for gifted students. Some of the studies discussed in a recent summary of research (Peterson, 2008a) supported the notion that high ability is a social and emotional asset; others, however, illuminated social or emotional limitations and burdens. In Mendaglio and Peterson's (2007) edited volume of counseling models, clinicians specializing in working with gifted youth reported that trauma, problematic behavior, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, perfectionism, bullying, learning disability, underachievement, career-development impasse, and poor coping were among presenting issues.

Other literature related to development is also pertinent. According to Erikson (1968), the period of active exploration of identity is likely to be pronounced in persons with high ability, potentially contributing to intense conflict with parents. In regard to identity,

some gifted students, especially females, reject achievement in favor of peer acceptance (Swiatek & Dorr, 1998). In addition, some gifted students, because of ability and circumstances, are parentified, with developmentally inappropriate family responsibilities (Jurkovik, 1997). Parents and educators may also erroneously assume that all highly motivated and high-performing students' social and emotional development should match their high level of cognitive development, unaware that asynchronous development is not unusual in this population (Silverman, 2002). Young gifted children with uneven development may struggle with meaning and social-justice issues because of advanced moral development, sensitivity to peers (Piechowski, 1999), and concern about world events and problems (Freeman, 1994), but may not be equipped emotionally to handle their heightened awareness. In addition, gifted youth with extreme talent may not be socially and emotionally prepared to handle the power and attention that such levels of ability often generate (Grobman, 2006). In regard to emotional sensitivities and difficulties with developmental challenges, Dabrowski's (1967) theory of positive disintegration has been influential. The theory views psychoemotional struggle as *required* for higher levels of personality development (cf. Mendaglio, 2008), for which gifted individuals have potential.

Given the clinical and conceptual literature about needs, even the field of gifted education may not have advocated as strongly as it could have for including proactive counseling approaches to promote healthy social and emotional development—in support of and also independent of focus on academic performance. It should be noted, however, that research samples of "gifted students" for many decades (e.g., Ludwig & Cullinan, 1984; Nail & Evans, 1997; Scholwinski & Reynolds, 1985; Wai, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2005) may not have been inclusive enough across cultural, socioeconomic, or performance spectra to reflect concerns of a broad range of highly able students accurately and may have perpetuated positive stereotypes about social and emotional strengths.

Missed Opportunities to Affirm Ability

Individual, school, and home-environment factors may contribute to the complex, perplexing phenomenon of underachievement, the issue

that brings high-ability students to the attention of school and other counselors most frequently (Colangelo, 2003). Identification practices for special programs, often focused solely on scores on standardized tests (Coleman, Gallagher, & Foster, 1994; Ford & Grantham, 2003), can miss highly able underachievers and students whose nonmainstream cultural values and behaviors, life circumstances, lack of parental support, depression, lack of language proficiency, skepticism about school, disabilities, behavior, or even illness preclude optimal standardized test or classroom performance (Peterson, 2006a).

Counseling Issues and Approaches

Although the primary emphasis in the gifted education field has been on achievement, rather than on happiness, well-being, and satisfaction (Moon, 2003), differentiated counseling of gifted individuals has had scholarly attention (e.g., Hébert, 1991; Mandel & Marcus, 1995; Moon & Hall, 1998; Rimm, 1986), with new contributions in the past decade (e.g., Achter & Lubinski, 2005; Buescher, 2004; Colangelo, 2003; Hébert & Olenchak, 2000; Mendaglio & Peterson, 2007; Moon & Thomas, 2003). In addition to adaptations of traditional approaches, differential counseling for gifted students can include proactive, school-based affective curriculum for developmental guidance (e.g., Betts & Kercher, 1999; Buescher, 2004; Peterson, 2008b; VanTassel-Baska, 2006). Counseling may also focus on specific developmental tasks, such as incorporating giftedness into one's identity (Mahoney, 2007).

In general, however, relatively little guidance for differentiating counseling approaches for gifted youth is available. Findings in this study suggest a need for information and models related to working with this population. Findings also raise awareness not only of current attention to giftedness in counselor preparation programs, but also of barriers to, and existing support for, providing it.

Method

Participants

The main focus of the study was on the preparation of school counselors to work with gifted school-age youth. The researchers recognized that graduate students in various preparatory counseling programs often take core courses together and are all likely to work with gifted children and adolescents in the future, regardless of venue. However, because school counselors are trained specifically to work with school-age children, those programs were of particular interest. The sample therefore consisted of all counselor education programs with a CACREP-accredited school counseling program at the time of the study. The sample was identified from the CACREP website, and survey instruments were sent to the CACREP liaison listed. Of the 149 identified programs, 79 responded (53% response rate). Most respondents were from mid-sized universities (student population 10,000–25,000; $n = 32$; 41.0%), with approximately one quarter from universities with student populations over 25,000 ($n = 18$; 23.1%) and approximately one third from universities with student populations under 10,000 ($n = 28$; 35.9%). Most of the school counseling programs ($n = 68$; 87.2%) were located in a school, college, or division of education. Just over half ($n = 35$; 53.0%) of the school counseling programs were located in physical proximity to a special education program, and 39.4% ($n = 26$) were located near both a special education program and a gifted education program. Five school counseling programs (7.6%) were located near a gifted program, but not near a special education program.

Procedure and Instrument

An electronic survey and cover letter were sent to the CACREP liaison at each of the accredited school counseling programs. The return rate was 28%. A follow-up packet of the survey and cover letter was sent by regular mail to those who had not responded approximately four weeks later, according to the electronic summary list of partici-

pating institutions. The return rate of the combined electronic and hard-copy versions of the survey was 53%.

The nonstandardized survey instrument, based on the authors' tacit understanding of university structure, funding, and training, was 22 questions in length, comprising four different survey segments. The four-question demographic segment assessed features of the school counseling program, including size of the university, length of the program in credit-hours, inclusion of the program in a school/college/division of education, and physical proximity of the program to a gifted education program and/or a special education program. The six-question second segment assessed courses, components, and faculty of the school counseling program regarding inclusion of required and/or elective coursework focusing on giftedness; the total number of faculty engaged in teaching school counseling students; and the number of school counseling faculty with significant knowledge about and/or expertise in gifted education. The eight-question third segment assessed barriers to including attention to social and emotional concerns of gifted children and adolescents (e.g., "lack of funding;" "no accreditation requirement to provide it") and was scored on a six-point Likert-type scale (6 = *great barrier*; 1 = *not a barrier at all*). The final segment included four items that addressed faculty perceptions of training related to giftedness (e.g., "level of faculty support for, and openness to, including a focus on concerns of gifted children/adolescents in preparatory curriculum") and was scored on a six-point Likert-type scale (6 = *very high level*; 1 = *essentially none at all*).

Results

Curriculum

Regarding course attention to giftedness, only one program (1.3%) responded that there was a required course specifically about gifted children and/or adolescents, and 15.2% of the sample (n = 12) offered an elective course about gifted children and/or adolescents. Forty-eight programs (60.8%) offered a required course with a component focusing on gifted children/adolescents. When taken in aggregate,

Table 1

Course Content Related to Giftedness

Category	*n*	% of Participants
Required course	1	1.3%
Elective course	12	15.2%
Component in required course	48	60.8%
At least small exposure	53	67.1%
Six or fewer contact hours	46	(94% of the 67.1%)
Three or fewer contact hours	37	(75% of the 67.1%)
One contact hour or less	6	(13% of the 67.1%)

just over two thirds of programs ($n = 53$; 67.1%) offered at least limited exposure to gifted children/adolescents. However, of the programs with required coursework or course components, 94% ($n = 46$) offered six or fewer contact (not credit) hours related to giftedness in the entire preparatory program, 75% ($n = 37$) devoted three or fewer contact hours, and 13% ($n = 6$) provided one contact hour or less. See Table 1 for a summary of program attention.

Faculty

A mean of 5.48 ($SD = 3.46$) faculty were involved in teaching school counseling students. Of those faculty, a mean of 1.25 ($SD = 1.10$) were reported to have "significant knowledge/expertise in giftedness, gifted education, social/emotional needs of gifted children/adolescents."

Barriers

The barriers section of the survey looked at the level of impact eight potential barriers had on "including attention to social and emotional concerns of gifted children/adolescents in school counseling preparation." Of the eight, seven were rated at a level between "could be a barrier" and "probably a barrier." The exception, "no room in the curriculum," had the highest reported mean ($M = 4.05$; $SD = 1.89$), indicating that room in the curriculum was "probably a barrier." Notably,

nearly one third of respondents (n = 26; 32.9%) reported that lack of room in the curriculum was a "great barrier," and an additional 17 (21.5%) responded that it was "definitely a barrier." "Lack of funding" (M = 3.70; SD = 1.88), "no accreditation requirement to provide it" (M = 3.68; SD = 1.64), and "no state or national standards requiring it" (M = 3.58; SD = 1.61) were the second-, third-, and fourth-ranked barriers, respectively. Other barriers included "lack of faculty interest in the subject area" (M = 3.42; SD = 1.52), "lack of philosophical support for it among faculty" (M = 3.42; SD = 1.55), "lack of community support for attention to social/emotional needs of gifted children" (M = 3.33; SD = 1.50), and "lack of graduate-student interest in the subject area" (M = 3.24; SD = 1.53).

Support

The final section of the survey assessed respondents' perceptions of their entire program faculty in regard to levels of expertise, need to increase expertise, support for including topics of giftedness in the curriculum, and interest in concerns of gifted children and adolescents. Mean responses for these four topics fell between "low" and "moderate" levels. "Support for, and openness to, including a focus on concerns of gifted children/adolescents in preparatory curriculum" received the highest mean response (M = 3.52; SD = 1.01), reflecting a moderate level of openness to inclusion of issues pertaining to giftedness in the curriculum. The categories "current level of interest . . . in teaching about the psychological concerns of gifted children/adolescents" (M = 3.38; SD = 1.01), "collective faculty academic or clinical expertise in concerns of the gifted" (M = 3.33; SD = 1.08), and "perceived need . . . for increasing the expertise of faculty regarding psychological concerns of gifted children/adolescents" (M = 3.33; SD = 1.22) reflected a perceived low to moderate level of expertise, perceived need for increasing this expertise, faculty support for this topic, and interest in teaching about the gifted.

Discussion

The percent of programs giving at least some attention to giftedness in the curriculum is relatively high. However, the 75% who offer only three or fewer contact hours are not likely to be able to explore affective complexities adequately. The finding that between 20% and 25% of counselor educators teaching school counseling students are perceived to have expertise and/or clinical experience with concerns related to giftedness might be seen as encouraging. Faculty members probably typically have areas of expertise not shared by colleagues, and knowledge of giftedness appears to be one of those. The small standard deviation might indicate that the perceived expertise is obvious and certain. The larger standard deviation for number of faculty, on the other hand, suggests that this expertise may not be present in many programs.

The findings related to barriers reflect an already full curriculum, according to the mean finding in that area. However, the little interest among faculty and graduate students and the lack of philosophical support among faculty suggest that investment in this area is unlikely to occur if funding, requirements, and other incentives are not in place.

Although there was moderate openness to including topics related to giftedness, the low-to-moderate level of perceived interest, expertise, or need related to teaching about this area indicates that counselor educators may indeed not be inclined to see high-ability youth as warranting special attention in counselor preparation unless national accreditation or state standards require that programs make room in their curriculum for it and unless pertinent information is made available. However, these findings were not unexpected. Positive media stereotypes and school images of "brightest" students usually do not make a compelling argument that there is a multitude of potential social, emotional, career-development, and academic concerns in this school population.

The finding that counselor educators are moderately open to including topics related to giftedness in the curriculum mildly contrasts the perceptions of low-to-moderate collective expertise, interest in including pertinent information, and perceived need for increasing expertise among faculty. However, openness may mean that focused professional development may lead to interest and inclusion. The

finding that nearly half of the programs were located near a gifted-education program means that, for those programs, expertise and resources are in close proximity and probably available. The perceived lack of faculty and student interest, lack of philosophical support, and lack of community support do not appear to be defensible arguments against including attention to giftedness and differentiated counseling approaches for gifted individuals in counselor preparation, given the clinical and empirical evidence in the literature that attention to affective concerns is warranted. Lack of interest does not mean that information related to differentiating counseling for gifted students should not be developed. The barriers revealed here call attention to areas that can be targeted for building knowledge and expertise.

If counselor educators perceive little need to attend to giftedness in curriculum, and if new standards will require attention to ability, including extreme ability, new curriculum needs to be developed. Foundational materials could discuss the possibility that educators and counselors may, without empathy, disregard parents' and other advocates' expressed concerns about gifted students' need for differentiated curriculum and instruction (cf. Tomlinson, 2004) and about their social and emotional development or general well-being. Findings may reflect that educators and counselors are simply unaware of complex affective concerns of gifted students and not inclined to consider factors associated with giftedness as risk factors warranting differential counseling approaches.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, including that it was entirely self-report in nature. In addition, those who responded were likely either program coordinators or school counseling faculty to whom the survey may have been forwarded. They may not have had specific knowledge about quality and comprehensiveness of course content or about length of time focused on working with gifted students. In addition, levels of openness, expertise, and experience of colleagues were probably difficult to gauge, whether asking directly or surmising from a distance. Two ambiguous terms in the survey might also have been a problem. *Expertise* may have been interpreted narrowly or

broadly, depending on a responder's knowledge of giftedness. *Funding* may have been connected to hiring, grants, or bringing in consultants.

It is, of course, difficult to know how knowledgeable counselor educators are about the implications of giftedness for the social, emotional, academic, and career development of gifted children and adolescents. This study did not explore whether perception of need was related to level of awareness. This study was also not comparative. Its focus was limited to giftedness. Therefore, pertinent differences among various sizes of institutions and between attention to special education for students with disabilities and attention to giftedness were not established. In addition, assumptions based on the researchers' examination of available textbooks may not accurately reflect differences in the amount of program attention to gifted students versus students with disabilities.

Although there are several limitations, this research is the first to survey the extent that information related to giftedness is included in counselor education curriculum. Findings can provoke thought about what is appropriate and possible in regard to including giftedness in the curriculum to increase school counselors' competence and effectiveness when working with gifted students representing varying levels of motivation for academic achievement. The same is true for community and college counselors, who also can help gifted individuals make sense of their emotions and behaviors and meet developmental and academic challenges.

Implications for Practice and Research

Practice

As mentioned in the review of literature, highly able students may have obstacles related to seeking help, such as ability to compensate for or disguise concerns and/or a desire to solve their problems independently. However, they can be responsive clients (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996). Existing models can guide counselors. Clinicians working with families with gifted members should include school, peer, and giftedness issues in their case conceptualizations and treatment plans. Counselors

working with gifted individuals in any venue can offer them psychoeducational information related to giftedness in order to normalize sensitivities, intensities, and asynchronous development, for example. Professionals can put developmental challenges and transitions into perspective and normalize classroom and social difficulties. Counselor educators can help practitioners be prepared for working with gifted students. School counseling interns can be encouraged to include proactive group work with gifted students in order to offer an important service and gain confidence and competence.

When working with highly able individuals, as with any other population, it is also important that counselors be alert to intellectually gifted students' personal strengths unrelated to academic or other performance. Important assets may be overshadowed by performance or nonperformance and not otherwise affirmed by peers or significant adults in gifted students' lives. Identifying and supporting those assets may be crucial to well-being.

When professional counselors are not aware of the implications of giftedness for social and emotional development and for counseling needs and approaches, gifted students' troubling thoughts, feelings, and behaviors may have no chance to be normalized and may even be misdiagnosed. When professionals are not knowledgeable about the potential function and impact of giftedness in the family system (cf. Moon & Thomas, 2003), they may dismiss parents' concerns or miss evidence of, for example, a gifted child being parentified, reflecting an upset family hierarchy (Gurman & Kniskern, 1991), or other problems related to family dynamics. In addition, when they do not associate sensitivities and intensities with giftedness and do not respond supportively when harassment or other trauma has occurred, tragedies like school shootings can result (e.g., Zirkel, 2005). When school counselors are knowledgeable about giftedness, they can not only self-reflect about their own biases, but also help to increase teachers' awareness of and responsiveness to student concerns.

Appropriate reactive approaches are important, of course, when responding to presenting issues of gifted youth. However, the literature suggests that proactive counseling approaches are especially important because concerns are often not obvious and because adults may otherwise give little attention to nonacademic, noncognitive development. Because of common public perceptions of gifted youth, and the latter's

potential reticence, counselor educators might emphasize prevention-oriented guidance—through small-group (membership homogeneous in regard to high ability) or large-group guidance (Peterson, 2003, 2008b) or through strategies involving oral or written communication, such as Socratic seminars, shared inquiry, and problem-based learning (VanTassel-Baska, 2006). Regardless of approach or venue, it is important for counselors to enter the world of a gifted individual respectfully and nonjudgmentally, open to the possibility that both achievers and underachievers may hide vulnerabilities and distress in order to avoid tarnishing their image, avoid disappointing adults who are highly invested in them, or protect high-stress parents.

Like other educators, counselors may have attitudes or behaviors that preclude trusting relationships and effective work with gifted students, such as the following (cf. Peterson, 2006b):

- the impulse to compete with them intellectually—to be "one-up";
- the perception that high-ability students need less support than others;
- a bias that advanced courses are not appropriate for culturally nonmainstream students or students with behavior problems;
- a narrow view of underachievement that precludes broad consideration of academic options; or
- discomfort with or negative judgment about gifted students whose behaviors are not gender-typical.

Any of these responses may affect counselors' empathy, objectivity, recognition of vulnerabilities, career guidance, and general effectiveness with these students.

The findings in this study also have implications for the school counselor's role in identification of students for gifted education programs. When highly able students are identified as gifted, they may at least be able to experience a differentiated academic curriculum. When they are not, they are unlikely to experience either differentiated curriculum or differentiated counseling. When not identified, teachers and counselors may not consider that giftedness sometimes has bearing on behavior and academic problems. In addition, if not understood, nontraditional intelligence profiles (Seeley, 1984) are unlikely to be affirmed and accommodated. School counselors who are not knowledgeable about the concerns of this population may

not advocate for services for gifted students who do not fit common stereotypes. Including literature during counselor preparation about conceptions of giftedness among various nonmainstream cultures, as well as the complex phenomenon of underachievement, can help future school counselors be informed and active during the process of identification for programs. When they are alert to characteristics related to giftedness, they can make referrals to selection committees, who might request additional, nontraditional assessments to determine eligibility (Naglieri & Ford, 2005). Informed counselors can also argue for programming that accommodates a wide variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, abilities, disabilities, and personalities. In addition, they can advocate for affective curriculum for gifted students in addition to, or as part of, the gifted education curriculum, collaborating with gifted education teachers and drawing from differential counseling models and information about characteristics and development in the literature. This literature can also be incorporated into counselor education curriculum. Perhaps user-friendly access to pertinent information, counseling models, and curriculum modules would take advantage of faculty openness to exploring this area and generate interest and philosophical support.

Research

School and other counselors who accept the reality that there is much that has not been ascertained by researchers can also be part of a continuing process of discovery about social and emotional development of gifted youth. A multitude of areas have not had much or any research attention in connection with giftedness: eating disorders, self-injury, substance abuse, sexual abuse, obsessive-compulsive disorder, parent-child conflict, developmental transitions, developmental stuckness, physical disability, and response to positive (e.g., major award, success in high-profile competitions) or negative (e.g., death of someone close, divorce, serious illness, accident, relocation) life events. With so little research attention to counseling issues within the field of gifted education, little is known about whether and to what extent there are qualitative differences in how gifted individuals *experience* these phenomena and how counselors should differentiate their services for gifted youth across cultures and across socioeconomic levels.

The findings here might encourage researchers to examine how prepared agency counselors are to respond to highly able clients and if and how they and school counselors differentiate approaches for highly able students in schools. In addition, researchers might not only examine counselors' knowledge level but also their comfort level when working with gifted clients. The findings in this study suggest that counselor educators and clinical professionals with expertise related to giftedness create pertinent curriculum for inclusion in counselor preparation. Because no studies have assessed educators' and counselors' knowledge about the social and emotional development of students with high intellectual ability, researchers might explore this area as well.

Conclusion

The study revealed that counselor education programs, when preparing new professionals, are generally not giving more than scant attention to the salience of giftedness when counselors assess and respond to a multitude of issues presented by highly able individuals. Curricular constraints, funding, the lack of encouragement in the form of standards, and the lack of philosophical support among faculty were among the largest perceived barriers to attending to giftedness in the preparatory curriculum. The low perceived expertise, interest among faculty, and perceived need might reflect lack of awareness, given the evidence in pertinent literature of concerns and a need for differential counseling approaches.

Such relatively little emphasis in preparatory programs on the impact of characteristics associated with giftedness on social, emotional, and career development suggests that school and other counselors may not respond to gifted students appropriately, when they have opportunity to interact with them about academic, career, social, and emotional concerns. Furthermore, like other educators who may be unaware of complex affective concerns of gifted students and of non-asset aspects of high capability, counselors may have attitudes and biases that preclude effective work with this population. Attention in counselor education programs to individuals at the upper end of a continuum of intellectual ability, focusing on how giftedness

influences psychosocial development and the counseling process, can help future school and other counselors differentiate counseling approaches appropriately.

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