

School Counseling and the Gifted Student: Implications for Training, Practice and Research

Susannah Wood, Ph.D.

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Counseling Service Providers

- Private practice & community counseling
 - individual
 - group
- Family counseling
- School counseling

Counseling and the Gifted Student

- Need for counseling support for gifted students well documented;
- A number of **counseling practices** suggested in gifted education literature; but not all empirically tested to determine “best practices”;
- Limited **outcome research** on whether or not (or the degree to which) specific counseling strategies, techniques, orientations or programming options are successful.

School Counseling and the Gifted Student

- Anecdotal evidence: school counselors are “for the other kids” (Peterson, 2002);
- Limited research on the interactions of these two groups;
- Need for research examining **experiences** in school counseling multiple perspectives:
 - What do school counselors know about gifted and talented students? What are they doing to serve this population?
 - What are gifted students experiencing?
 - Are suggested counseling “best practices” occurring? If so, which are successful?
 - How are school counselors trained and what could we be doing differently?

Study One: Quantitative

- Survey instrument developed based on most frequently cited counseling strategies in literature
- Piloted
- Instrument given to 153 identified gifted and talented high school students asking them about their experiences in school counseling:
 - The nature of their relationship with their counselor
 - The extent to which they experienced the counseling strategies suggested in the literature
 - What services they would have liked to have experienced
- Statistics used: descriptive statistics, factor analyses, MANOVA

Samples of Suggested “Best Practices” in Counseling the Gifted

Personal and Interpersonal Skills: problem solving skills, setting boundaries, communicating with others, dealing with hostility, leadership, positive self-talk, visualization, perspective taking, using humor, coping with stress, sustaining motivation

Self-knowledge and awareness: understanding conflict, mistakes as learning experiences, different styles and preferences, options and choices, healthy relationships, acceptance of self and others, perceptions, fitting in, self-esteem, strengths and talent

Pursuit of Excellence: understanding giftedness, perfectionism, loneliness, anxiety, pressure, high quality work, future contributions, expectations of self and others, frustration

Strategies/techniques: individual dialogue, small group, classroom guidance, biblio/cinematherapy, journaling, partnerships, mentors, apprenticeships, shadowing

General Findings

- 52.3% participants cited that **they did ask for help** on some the concerns they reported.
- 69.9% reported that their sessions were **academic in nature**.
- Overall, participants reported that the **core conditions** of counseling were met:
 - Their time was well spent
 - They were supported and encouraged and generally understood
 - The counselor was empathic, genuinely desired to understand them and took time to truly listen to them.

Experiences with “Best Practices”

The majority of best practices did not occur in the counseling experience.

- Personal and Interpersonal Skills: Over 100 of the 153 participants reported that 12 /13 skills or topics **did not occur** in the counseling session.
- Self-knowledge and awareness: Over 100 of the 153 participants reported that 12 /13 skills or topics **did not occur** in the counseling session.
- Pursuit of Excellence: Over 100 of the 153 participants reported that 12/15 skills or topics **did not occur** in the counseling session.

What Did Happen?

Topics that were discussed or experienced in school counseling were:

- Leadership
- Sustaining motivation
- Different learning styles and preferences
- Options and choices
- Strengths and talents
- Producing a high levels of work
- Contributions to society
- Self-expectations
- Expectations of others

What Students Would Have Liked to Have Seen...

Helpful **ACADEMIC** program offerings:

- meeting adults who had careers in similar fields of talent or interest
- making academic blueprints or flexible outlines for course planning
- discussing class structure and challenge

Helpful **CAREER** program offerings:

- apprenticeships
- mentoring
- shadowing professionals who work in talent areas

Study 2: Qualitative (n = 7)

What are school counselors' experiences with gifted students?

- Phenomenological
- Interpretivist
- SOIG and material culture
- Emergent data analysis
- Wholistic inductive analysis
- Unit of analysis: paragraph
- Etic categories
- Checks for trustworthiness/authenticity

The Gardener and the Garden

■ Primary Themes

- Challenge
- Relationship
- Service
- Training
- Knowledge and experience
- Beliefs and philosophy
- Concerns and constraints



The Gardener and the Garden

- The good earth: Challenge and rigor
- Watering, feeding, pruning: School counselors' service
- Different plants, different needs: The relationship
- The gardener: Beliefs and philosophy; knowledge and experience
- Sun, wind and rain: Concerns and constraints
- The *Good Housekeeping Basic Gardening Techniques* manual: Training

The Good Earth: Challenge

- Reactions to the earth:
 - Too wet
 - Too dry
 - Just right
- Putting down roots
 - Finding the balance
 - Skills to cope with challenge
- Starting to grow and thrive
 - What plant am I and what do I need?
 - Identity and meaning

Watering, Feeding, Pruning: The School Counselor's service

- What type of plant is this and what water and feed does it need?
 - Testing and assessment
 - Identification
 - Advocacy
 - Child Study/IEP team meetings
 - Referrals
 - Staff education/professional development

- How can we facilitate positive growth?
 - Academic planning
 - College/career exploration
 - Counseling (individual, group, classroom guidance)
 - Consultation and collaboration
 - Parent/student conferences
 - Extra individualized attention
 - Outside mentoring/coaching/extra curricular

Different plants, different needs: The relationship

- What type of plant is this?
 - What are the needs here?
 - What is the personality?
- Nurturing growth
 - Boundaries
 - Comfort level
 - Trust
 - Engagement in the relationship

The Gardener

- What plants need and when:
 - Beliefs and philosophy: gifted needs are different; they require accommodation and differentiation
 - ❖ Understanding of characteristics
 - ❖ Willingness to provide service and support
 - ❖ Understanding that the gifted need challenge and support

- To water or not to water:
 - Knowledge and experience
 - ❖ Through past services
 - ❖ Through personal experience as gifted student
 - ❖ Through seeking out information about the gifted and talented
 - ❖ Experience seems to drive knowledge if formal training was not in place

Sun, Wind and Rain: Concerns and Constraints

- The overly busy gardener
 - Lack of time
 - Overwhelming number of other plants
 - Floods and other crises
 - Push and pull of multiple roles
- The inhospitable climate
 - Elimination of or lack of resources (money, personnel, services)
 - Lack of parent and/or professional understanding and support
 - Lack of time and space for learning other skills

The *Good Housekeeping Basic Gardening Techniques*: Training

- Formal gardening classes not usually offered in graduate school. Gardening tips that were offered did not always match the plant the with which the gardener was working.
- Gardeners sought books and resources to help them better understand their plants and ways they should water and feed them.
- If gardeners could “do it all over again”:
 - At least one class at the graduate level.
 - Mandatory experiences and service in practicum and internship.
 - Current practical training: what is this plant and what do I do to help it grow? What do I NOT do?

So what do we know and do?

Training

- Independent courses in gifted education and psychology are not traditionally offered in master's school counseling curriculum and they are not, at this point, required by accrediting bodies.
- There is a need for increased awareness of gifted students as a unique population, knowledge of gifted education and psychology, skill set to work with G/T specific issues.
- Training suggestions:
 - At least one class on gifted education and psychology.
 - Exposure to NAGC program guidelines for school counseling programs.
 - Use of ASCA National Model in school counseling programming to facilitate student counselor skills in advocacy, leadership, partnering, accountability and coordination of resources on behalf of gifted students.
 - Forge alliances with state and national organizations.
- Current practitioners should receive professional development in gifted needs in order to increase skill set and service delivery.

So what do we do?

Current practice

- Service rooted in relationships and healthy challenges:
 - Examination of educational “fit” and individual values to determine future optimal growth/learning/work environment.
 - Discussion of life goals, flexibility in future planning, personal values, decision-making and life skills.
 - Lengthy exploration of expectations, stress, healthy balance and self care.
 - Preparation for transitions to college and world of work. Information and resources students can use for future planning. Find mentorship, apprenticeship, and shadowing opportunities.
- Professional development regarding characteristics and needs of gifted students and suggested best practices.
- Chances for self-exploration/awareness regarding beliefs and philosophies.

So where do we go?: Research

- Replication
- Longitudinal (tracking student counseling needs and counselor service delivery over time)
- Matched pairs (differences in experience?)
- Parental feedback on counselor service
- Establish a formalized, empirically-tested set of counseling “best practices” that can work in school counseling settings with gifted students
- Training interventions
- Effectiveness of current counselor preparation programs