

A Multicultural Competence Model for  
Counseling Gifted and Talented Children

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## Abstract

This paper introduces a model of multicultural competence targeted at school counselors who work or may work with gifted and talented children. The model is designed as an extension of the Multicultural Counseling Competence framework (Sue, D. W., 2001). The present model outlines three competencies believed to be important to efficacious counseling with culturally diverse children identified as gifted and talented: 1) counselor awareness of one's attitudes, assumptions, and biases about gifted and talented children; 2) understanding the characteristics of, and issues faced by gifted and talented children, and 3) developing appropriate interventions and strategies for counseling gifted and talented children.

## A Multicultural Competence Model for Counseling Gifted and Talented Children

Within the broad field of school counseling, one of the most important advances over the past 30 years is the recognition of the vital role cultural, and more specifically, multicultural influences have on the psychological presentation of clients. The recognition of the need to address the psychological issues of culturally diverse client populations led to the development of multicultural competence models. Sue, D. W. and colleagues have been at the forefront of the defining and refining what it means to be a multiculturally competent counselor (c.f., Sue, D.W., 2001; Sue, D. W., Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). The essence of Sue and colleagues' model is that multicultural counseling competence (MCC) is an "active, developmental, and ongoing process that is aspirational rather than achieved" (Sue, D. W. & Sue, D., 2003, p. 18). They contend that MCC hinges on three competencies: 1) counselor's awareness of one's own cultural assumptions, values, and beliefs (a.k.a., "Awareness"); 2) understanding the worldview of culturally diverse clients (a.k.a. "Knowledge"); and 3) developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques (a.k.a., "Skills").

Historically, MCC has been primarily focused on issues related to racial and ethnic diversity, including client's experiences with racism, oppression, and discrimination, as well as issues related to service delivery (e.g., counselor variables and attitudes). More recently, the scope of MCC has been broadened to include issues related to gender, sexual orientation and identity, age, and disabilities (Sue, D. W. & Sue, D., 2003). Although the original focus was on race and ethnicity, and the more contemporary focus has been on other broad cultural issues, the MCC models have yet to address dual- or

multi-cultural and sub-cultural identities operating within client populations. As MCC relates to one's ability potential, the focus has been on people with physical or development disabilities. This area of attention is needed, but such a limited focus negates and ignores the needs of students on the other end of the ability spectrum.

Robinson, Zigler, and Gallagher (2000) noted:

Individuals who are mental retarded or gifted share the burden of deviance from the norm in both a development and statistical sense... These individuals are out of sync with more average people, simply by their difference from what is expected by their age and circumstances. This asynchrony results in highly specific consequences for them and for those who share their lives (p. 1413).

Levy and Plucker (2003) posited that because of differential abilities and expectations associated with those abilities, gifted children constitute a unique *sub-culture* that necessitates understanding and application of specialized skills by helping professionals, including school counselors. Unfortunately, current models of multicultural counseling competence are inadequate for addressing competent practice with culturally diverse gifted populations. Thus, the goal of this paper is to extend the current conception of multicultural competence in an effort to increase school counselors' awareness, knowledge, and skills in working with culturally diverse gifted and talented students.

#### *A Model of Multicultural Counseling Competence for Gifted and Talented Clients*

Over the past 30 years there has been an increased scholarly interest in counseling gifted and talented clients, as evidenced by 152 of 159 PsycINFO citations for "counseling the gifted and talented" occurring since 1977. The foci of many of these

scholarly publications have been in four related areas: 1) identifying and understanding the characteristic associated with giftedness (e.g., Kerr, Colangelo, Maxey, & Christensen, 1992; Sternberg, 2004); 2) special issues faced by gifted populations (e.g., Lindstrom & Van Sant, 1986); 3) acquiring knowledge about the social and emotional development of gifted children (e.g., Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002); and 4) counseling considerations in counseling gifted students (e.g., Brown, 1993; Colangelo, 1991; Milgram, 1991; Moon, 2002; Peterson, 2006). The first three areas of work coincide with Sue and colleagues' conception of the "Knowledge" competency, and the final area is more closely related with the "Skills" competency. However, with few exceptions (e.g., Ford & Harris, 1995; O'Connor, 2005), the Competency of "Awareness" or examining counselor characteristics and attitudes toward and about gifted clients has been virtually ignored.

Although several authors have discussed stereotypes and faulty assumptions regarding giftedness (e.g., Guskin, Peng, & Simon, 1992; Kao, G., 2000; Maker, 1996; Rizza & Morrison, 2003; Sahin & Duzen, 1994), very little is known about what counselors think or believe about their gifted clients. If a counselor is unaware of the stereotypes, faulty beliefs, or negative (and over overly positive) attitudes they hold about their culturally diverse clients, it may negatively impact the process and outcomes of counseling (Helms, 1990; Pope-Davis, Menefee, and Ottavi, 1993). In addition, and related to the "Skills" competency, several authors have suggested counseling interventions to help meet the needs of gifted and talented clients (e.g., Colangelo, 1997; Kerr, 1991; Moon & Hall, 1998). Unfortunately, little empirical research has investigated

the applicability and appropriateness of specific theoretical interventions with gifted populations (Moon, 2002).

It is hoped that developing a framework for conceptualizing counseling competence with gifted and talented clients will serve as a springboard to generate multidisciplinary research and efficacious practice for fostering healthy social and emotional development of gifted children. We propose a model of multicultural competence for counseling gifted and talented children that is grounded in three competencies outlined by Sue and colleagues (See Table 1): Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills. Our model is an intentional extension of Sue and colleagues' model. The three fundamental assumptions in developing this model extension are: 1) gifted and talented individual comprise a distinct sub-culture; 2) the special gifts and talents that individual possess interact with the broader culture(s) in which these individuals live and operate; and 3) in order to be effective in working with clients with special gifts and talent, counselors must accurately understand the interaction of the clients' multiple cultural identities (Levy & Plucker, 2003).

As an extension of Sue and colleagues' MCC, the Multicultural Counseling Competence with Gifted and Talented Children (MCC-GT) acknowledges the importance of working to develop broad professional competence along with developing competence in working with specific populations. Part of being a competent school counselor is developing multicultural competence. As one is developing competence in a sub-specialty area like counseling gifted and talented children, one must also be developing competence in counseling children in general (for details see Kaczmarek & Wagner, 1994), as well as multicultural competence, broadly defined, with children

Table 1

*Competence Model for Counseling Culturally Diverse Gifted and Talented Children (MCC-GT)*

<b>Competency One: Awareness</b>	<b>Competency Two: Knowledge</b>	<b>Competency Three: Counseling Skills</b>
1. General awareness of biases, stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs about culturally diverse children. <sup>1</sup>	1. Possess clear and explicit knowledge of general characteristics of counseling and therapy with children. <sup>a,b</sup>	1. Counseling and Therapy skills a. general counseling skills <sup>a,b</sup> b. applications to gifted children
2. Awareness of attitudes toward and about diverse gifted and talented clients.	2. Possess specific knowledge about the nature and development of therapeutic issues with gifted children.	2. Consulting Skills a. resource to other professionals b. resource to parents
3. Awareness of similarities and differences counselors share with gifted and talented clients a. Issues related to counselors identified as gifted b. Issues related to non-gifted identified counselors	3. Possess specific knowledge and information about socio-, cultural, and educational issues of that may affect gifted children.	3. Advocacy Skills a. Educational programming b. Resource allocation
4. Sensitive to, and acknowledgement of, circumstances that may necessitate a referral of a gifted client to another counselor; or circumstances in need of supervision and consultation.		

*Note.* This model is explicitly designed as an extension of Sue and colleagues' model of Multicultural Counseling Competence (Sue, D. W., 2001; Sue, D. W., Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). <sup>a</sup>For a detailed description of multicultural competencies with children please see Liu & Clay (2002).

<sup>b</sup>For a detailed description of counseling competence with children see Kaczmarek & Wagner, (1994).

(for details see Liu & Clay, 2002). Thus, the first sub-competency under each of the three competencies outlined in Table 1 relates to broader counseling and multicultural counseling issues. For the purposes of this paper, we will limit our discussion to issues directly related to counseling competencies with gifted and talented children; however we acknowledge the need to view this development in the context of developing broader counseling and multicultural competence.

*Competency One: Counselor Awareness of One's Own Attitudes, Assumptions, and Beliefs about Gifted and Talented Children (Awareness)*

Counselors' perceptions, assumptions, and biases about cultural diverse clients can have a tremendous impact on clients' well being. As a school counselor, one must realize that by entering into a counseling relationship with a client, one has essentially become a potentially significant part of the client's environment. Thus, in working with gifted and talented clients, it is crucial for counselors to develop an awareness of their assumptions, values, biases, and beliefs about giftedness and the gifted in general, as well as their assumptions about giftedness in culturally diverse children.

*Awareness of attitudes toward gifted and talented children.* A culturally competent counselor of the gifted and talented actively and continually attempts to avoid prejudices, biases, and stereotyping. One of the most pervasive stereotypes that counselors need to avoid is the notion that gifted children are more resilient than their non-gifted peers and often do not need counseling services. This is simply not true (Plucker & Levy, 2001). Like all children, gifted children face numerous challenges that may necessitate counseling intervention.

In addition, gifted and talented children face issues specifically related to their experience with being gifted (see Competency Two: Knowledge) that may warrant counseling. Thus, competent counselors are aware of any differential expectations they hold regarding gifted and talented children compared to other students (see Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2005, for discussion of stereotypes specifically of creatively gifted people).

Similarly, counselors need to examine the assumptions, expectations, stereotypes, and prejudicial attitudes they hold regarding culturally diverse gifted children. In particular, competent counselors examine their beliefs about gifted girls and boys, gifted children of color, gifted sexual minority children, as well as other culturally diverse gifted populations. Examples of common stereotypes include: boys are better in math than girls; children of Asian descent are especially talented in science and math; African American students do not perform well on intelligence tests. Many of these stereotypes are reinforced in the context these children operate. For example, it has become common knowledge that teachers have been found to treat boys and girls differently with regard to performance expectancies in certain subjects (e.g., math). Thus, in the role of a school counselor, one must not reinforce erroneous stereotypes.

Counselors are held to a higher standard than the general public with regard to our interpretation of our clients. If an erroneous stereotype is reinforced by a professional helper, the potential to affect significant harm to child clients is great (i.e., because a helping professional reinforced that the stereotype was “true”). To aid in developing this competency, Sue and Sue (2003) suggest that

counselors actively challenge their assumptions and continually monitor their awareness by seeking supervision, consultation, and continuing education.

*Awareness of similarities and differences.* A culturally competent counselor is aware of the cultural similarities and differences they share with gifted and talented clients and strives to avoid culture-blindness (Ford, Moore, & Milner, 2005) and culture-consciousness (Ridley, 2005). As it relates to counseling gifted and talented children, culture-blindness is a mistaken assumption that the gifted and talented client is no different from the non-gifted and talent client; conversely, culture-consciousness is based on the premise that a gifted child's problems stem essentially from being gifted. Both of these erroneous assumptions are a function of lack of counselor self-awareness of their belief about cultural diversity, broadly, and giftedness in particular.

To some extent all counseling is cross-cultural counseling, because the counselor and client will not share the exact same cultural identity (even if they share similar characteristics). In counseling gifted clients, numerous possibilities for cross-cultural comparisons exist (e.g., gifted client paired with a counselor identified as gifted when a child versus a gifted client paired with a counselor not identified as gifted when a child; gifted client of color paired with a white counselor--either identified as gifted or not; white gifted client paired with a counselor of color--either identified as gifted or not; etc.). Does a competent counselor of gifted and talented children need to have been identified as gifted themselves? No ... just as a person does not need to have a developmental disability to counsel that population effectively.

The primary challenge for the “non-gifted” counselor is to be aware that some (but not all) of the issues presented by the gifted client may be directly related to the client’s experience with being gifted or talented (avoiding culture blindness). For the “gifted” counselor, a primary challenge may be not over-identifying with the gifted client, and placing too much weight on the issues associated with giftedness that they neglect to see the client’s idiosyncratic contribution to the presenting problem (avoiding culture consciousness). Similarly, the “gifted” counselor needs to guard against assuming that their experiences of being a gifted child are necessarily the same as their client’s experiences.

*Acknowledgement of need for referral, supervision, and consultation.*

Competent counselors are aware of their professional limitations and scope of practice, and make appropriate referrals when confronted with issues beyond their training and experience. With regard to this sub-competency, if a counselor is not familiar with specific issues encountered by gifted children, for example multipotentiality, and this is the issue that is of primary concern for the client, it may be appropriate to refer the client to a professional with knowledge and experience with this issue.

This principle should not be used simply as an excuse for not wanting to work with gifted clients. For example, if a gifted child presents to counseling with family issues, and the counselor is skilled in working with family issues, referral on the basis of “I don’t like working with gifted children” is neither acceptable nor ethical. In such a case, the competent counselor acknowledges the need to seek

supervision, consultation, and possibly counseling to help work through their issues with gifted children. Similarly, if counselors are in settings, such as schools, where the probability of encountering clients with special gifts and talents is great, competent counselors acknowledge their deficiency and takes actions to find appropriate resources, supervision, or consultation to increase their comfort level, as well as their knowledge and skills, in working with this population.

*Competency Two: Understanding Characteristics and Therapeutic Issues  
(Knowledge)*

The previous competency, “Awareness,” focused on the counselor’s perspective. This “Knowledge” competency focuses on the client. The essence of this competency is to acquire practical knowledge concerning the scope and nature of gifted and special talent that may affect the gifted and talented child’s psychological presentation. In addition, competency in this area also requires that counselors examine the interaction of the client’s “gifted and talented” identity with the greater cultural context(s) in which the child lives and operates.

*Nature and development of therapeutic issues.* The literature provides considerable evidence that gifted and talented individuals – at least those who are consistently and intellectually challenged – have considerable affective advantages when compared to less talented children and adults. But many talented individuals are not achieving at high levels or consistently challenged, and even the most well-adjusted, successful people may encounter certain intra- and interpersonal difficulties (Levy & Plucker, 2003). Many of the following issues

may be related, but empirical evidence about comorbidity of these and other issues among gifted people is inconclusive.

*Perfectionism.* A quality often associated with talented individuals is perfectionism brought on by pressure to perform consistently at high levels. For example, students have identified perfectionism as a factor in career decision-making (Emmett & Minor, 1993). There has been much debate in the literature as to whether perfectionism is positive or negative. On the negative side, a variety of psychological disorders are associated with perfectionism, including depression, obsessive-compulsive personality disorders, and suicide, among others (Callahan, 1993; Hewitt & Dyck, 1986; Rasmussen & Eisen, 1992). In one of the few studies to investigate different types of perfectionism among gifted individuals, Parker (1997) found that 42% of academically talented students exhibited healthy perfectionistic tendencies and 26% exhibited dysfunctional perfectionistic tendencies. Although additional research on perfectionism is needed, the considerable task commitment and energy exhibited by many high achievers may occasionally manifest itself in healthy or dysfunctional perfectionism.

*Eccentric behaviors.* Eccentricity is a type of deviance that is often mistakenly associated with psychosis. While schizophrenia and other mental disorders usually lead to dysfunction, eccentrics tend to function well (albeit in ways that appear strange to most people). In both cases, the concept of freedom – to think and behave as one wishes – is present, but the exercise of personal freedom is less dysfunctional in the eccentric. The most comprehensive study of

eccentrics to date found that highly gifted individuals tend to exhibit signs of eccentricity, and that eccentrics are often creative (Weeks & James, 1995). Recent analyses suggest that eccentricity may be allowed to flourish in some contexts more than others because (1) it may be a matter of personal expression and not an innate need to be different and (2) some cultures (e.g., San Francisco) are much more tolerant of eccentric behavior than others (Therivel, 1999; Weeks & James, 1995).

*Jealousy and envy.* Although professional jealousy has received relatively little empirical attention, it appears to be a serious interpersonal challenge faced by most gifted and talented children and adults. In more precise terms, the talented individual often encounters *envy* – resentment from people who perceive that they have less talent – and *jealousy* – resentment from people who feel threatened by roughly similar talents (Bedeian, 1995). These complex emotions can lead to a host of problems related to interpersonal stress, including difficulty in creating and maintaining personal relationships, political problems in the workplace, and intra-office competition (Vecchio, 1997, 2000). Although professional jealousy is often seen in adults, gifted children may also experience similar jealous reactions, such as the social stigma of giftedness mentioned earlier and perceptions by peers of being the “teacher’s pet” or receiving other preferential treatment (Martin, 1984; Tal & Babad, 1989). In addition to posing problems for talented individuals, jealousy and envy may serve as a distraction that disrupts group performance (Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Miner, 1990; Sias & Jablin, 1995). Although de Vries (1992) suggested that workplace envy can be used as

a motivator, this seems rash given the potentially hostile environment such actions could create for talented children and adults.

*Quality of relationships.* Being talented entails a number of personal sacrifices. Indeed, gifted individuals often report being lonely and socially isolated from their peers, especially if they see themselves as being different from their peers (Pfeiffer, 2001; Robinson, 1996). Talented individuals may also hold high self-expectations and high expectations for others, complicating relationships (Lovecky, 1986; Streznewski, 1999). Paradoxically, these same individuals may have a need for recognition by others (Lewis, Kitano, & Lynch, 1992) and companionship with other talented people (Bloom, 1985), creating situations in which they hold others to high standards but desire others' approval and friendship at the same time. These strained relationships may be found close to home – literally. Several researchers have observed the complexity of relationships with intellectually gifted students and their families (Bloom, 1985; Moon, Jurich, & Feldhusen, 1998; Subotnik & Olszewski-Kubilius, 1997).

*Managing the expectations of others.* Gifted and talented individuals often encounter great difficulty in fulfilling their potential (Colangelo & Fleuridas, 1986; Perrone, 1986), leading to concerns about underachievement (Peterson & Colangelo, 1996). The factors associated with long-term underachievement include family attitude toward school and jobs and aspirations either too high or too low for the gifted individual (Laycook, 1979). Families of gifted children may be overtly child-centered with extremely high expectations, leading to independence and identity issues as the child ages (Robinson, 1996). These

problems may be exacerbated if the children feel a need to please their parents (Willings, 1985).

These problems directly impact education and career decisions. Emmett and Minor (1993) found evidence that sensitivity to others' expectations is a major issue during gifted adolescents' career decision-making. At the same time, talented individuals may have to deal with artificially low expectations outside of their area of talent, with people often expecting gifted individuals to behave erratically or fit in poorly (Halpern & Luria, 1989). Dyssynchrony, a mismatch among areas of cognitive or social development, may amplify problems related to others' expectations (Heller, 1992).

*Possess specific knowledge and information about socio-, cultural, and educational issues that may affect gifted children.*

Like all people, gifted individuals can and do identify with numerous cultural groups. It is important for counselors not only to develop an understanding (or knowledge) of the group-specific worldviews of their primary cultural groups (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), but also to develop an understanding of how giftedness (in general) is conceptualized within those worldviews.

One challenge to overcome in this process is recognizing that perceptions about the gifted may be differentially influenced by clients' other cultural identities. In Western culture, there appears to be a great pressure for people to be "normal," with a considerable stigma associated with giftedness or talent (Colangelo & Fleuridas, 1986; Cross, Coleman, & Stewart, 1993; Cross,

Coleman, & Terhaar-Yonkers, 1991; Swiatek & Dorr, 1998). This is especially true for talented girls and people of color (Borland, 2004; Evans, 1996; Ford & Harris, 1996; Kerr, 1994; Kitano, 1998; Noble, Subotnik, & Arnold, 1999; Plucker, 1994, 1996; Reis, 1995; Reis & Callahan, 1989; Robinson, 1997), who face enormous social pressures to not appear intelligent in many educational settings. Identity issues also influence decisions about potential careers and preparing for those careers.

*Gender issues.* The vast majority of empirical literature exploring the interaction of identities in gifted children has focuses on the challenges faced by gifted girls. Girls who are talented must not only battle sexism faced by all females, but also face challenges directly related to being a “gifted girl.” Reis (2002) identified the existence of several factors that appear to contribute to gifted girls not realizing their potential including: external barriers (e.g., lack of support for parents and teachers), personality factors (e.g., loss of belief in abilities and self-confidence), personal priorities, and social and emotional issues (e.g., gifted girls may face enormous social pressures not to appear intelligent or talented in many educational settings).

Common interpersonal challenges faced by talented females include impact of parents’ and teachers’ perceptions and expectations. Research suggests that parental attitudes and beliefs about the abilities and achievements of their gifted female children often supercede the child’s self-perceptions of their own performance (Dickens, 1990; Parsons, Adler, Kaczala, 1982; Phillips, 1987). Similarly, teachers also have a profound influence on the identity of gifted

females. Research suggests that teachers often favor, or have differential attitudes toward, high achieving boys as compared to girls. For example, Cooley, Chauvin, and Karnes (1984) found that teachers, regardless of gender, perceived high achieving boys more competent than gifted girls in skills related to critical and logical thinking, and creative problem solving; while gifted girls were perceived to be more capable on creative writing tasks.

Reis (1995, 1998, 2002) noted the lasting impact that negative external messages have on gifted females even after they reach adulthood. Several authors have noted the impact of negative messages about their giftedness may influence gifted females to doubt their abilities (e.g., Arnold, 1995; Bell, 1989; Reis & Callahan, 1989). For example, Buescher, Olszewski, and Higham (1987) found that gifted males and females were generally more similar to one another than their non-gifted peers with one exception: gifted boys tended to recognize and accept their gifts more than gifted girls. This lack of recognition and acceptance can lead to social dilemmas for gifted females including: perceiving achievement and affiliation as opposite issues (i.e., they do not wish to compete with their peers); difficulty with comparisons and downplaying accomplishments; and fearing social isolation as a consequence of success (Bell).

Interpersonal challenges also exist for gifted males. Although the empirical research specifically addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted males is limited, there is evidence to suggest that boys do face issues related to their giftedness including: identity and belief in self, appreciating psychological androgyny, emotional sensitivity, and empathy (Hébert, 2000a, 2000b; Wilcove,

1998). These challenges generally involve experiences and expressions of emotion. It is theorized that gifted individuals are highly sensitive to emotions and may experience what is referred to as emotional overexcitability (Dabrowski, 1972; Piechowski, 1997). For gifted boys, the interaction of the social and cultural context is crucial in developing a positive sense of self and acceptance of psychological androgyny, which Csikszentmihalyi (1996) defines as “a person’s ability to be at the same time aggressive and nurturant, sensitive and rigid, dominant and submissive, regardless of gender” (p. 71).

*Racial/ethnic issues.* The majority of literature concerning gifted people of color focuses on the gifted identification process (Hébert, 2002; Plucker, 1996). Scholars have discussed the barriers to identification, which include racism, stereotypes, and institutional and systemic problems; however few studies have addressed the counseling needs of these individuals once identified. The studies that have addressed social and emotional needs of culturally diverse gifted individuals have found similar findings to gifted women including the need to develop a dual identity and lack of systemic support (Hébert, 2002).

Specific examples of research conducted with gifted people of color include Cordeiro and Carspecken’s (1993) ethnography which found that for high achieving Latinos to succeed, they needed to develop an identity that would allow them to separate from both the school culture and Latino culture of their neighborhood. In addition, evidence suggests that gifted Latinos carried that responsibility for their academic success alone, without full understanding or support from the families. Also, Ford (1992, 1993, 1995) found evidence that

gifted African American students may experience more psychological and social and emotional problems than nonidentified African American students due to a perceived lack of acceptance by peers, teachers, and parents by assimilating a value system regarding education held by the dominant culture.

*Sexual orientation issues.* For gifted gay and lesbian individuals, Peterson and Rischar (2000) found that the burden of being twice different does appear to be related to depression and feelings of isolation. To mediate this stress, some gifted gay students coped by academic or athletic overachievement, perfectionism, or overinvolvement in extracurricular activities; others attempted to cope through more self-destructive behaviors such as dropping out of school, running away, substance abuse, or suicide.

*Identity across contexts.*

As a whole, research on the interaction of cultural and gifted identities has found that culturally diverse gifted children find themselves in a dilemma in which they must choose between academic success and social acceptance (Lindstrom & San Vant, 1986). Levy and Plucker (2003) also suggest that it is important to view one's gifts within the cultural context that one lives (i.e., Is the person's talent viewed positively or negatively within one's cultural context?). In summarizing this challenge, a gifted African American student once said: "I had to fight to be gifted and then I had to fight because I am gifted" (Lindstrom & San Vant, 1986, p. 584).

In a related vein, talented individuals may frequently encounter problems when moving from one educational or social context to another (Harter, 1992;

Plucker & Yecke, 1999; Robinson, 1997). Labeled the big fish/little pond effect (BFLPE) by Marsh and his colleagues (Marsh & Parker, 1984), the decline in self-concept when a person who considers themselves to be talented in one context (e.g., a small elementary school) and less talented in after one moves to a different context (e.g., a very large, regional middle school). The BFLPE is supported by considerable empirical support (e.g., Delcourt, Loyd, Cornell, & Goldberg, 1994; Marsh, Chessor, Craven, & Roche, 1995; Plucker & Stocking, 2001). There is considerable debate about whether the BFLPE is good or bad – or neither, and the lack of longitudinal studies leaves the possibility that the self-concept decline is temporary (e.g., Dai, Moon, & Feldhusen, 1998; Plucker et al., 2004). Additionally, research on two of the more pronounced transitions faced by students, from high school to college and from college into the workforce, is incredibly sparse (Robinson, 1987). For the time being, counselors should note that self-concept results from internal and external mechanisms that can both change when the client experiences any changes in their environment.

### *Competency Three: Developing Appropriate Counseling Skills (Skills)*

Competent counselors of gifted and talented children integrate their Awareness and Knowledge competencies into practical skills. As a professionally trained counselor, one does not necessarily need to develop a unique counseling style in working with gifted and talented clients, but rather use their awareness and knowledge of giftedness and related issues to better inform their practical strategies. Thus, competency in this area is more than developing counseling skills in general, but also involves applying one's knowledge and skills in a

manner that is most efficacious with clients with special gifts and talents. Competent counselors of gifted and talented client possess Skills in three practical areas: 1) counseling and therapy skills; 2) consultation skills, and 3) advocacy skills.

*Family counseling skills.* Freeman (2000) argues that families are the essential context for gifts and talent. Unfortunately, many practitioners who conduct family therapy do not have expertise in giftedness (Colangelo & Assouline, 2000; Moon & Hall, 1998). In addition, no randomized controlled studies have examined the efficacy of specific family therapy interventions with gifted populations (Moon, 2002)., and those limited studies that have investigated counseling interventions with families of gifted children have been limited to White, middle class, two parent families (Moon & Hall). Thus, many practitioners have relied on using a general family systems approach (e.g., Zuccone & Amerikaner, 1986) or an integrated, common factors approach (Moon, Nelson, & Piercy, 1993).

Moon and colleagues (e.g., Moon, 2002; Moon & Hall, 1998; Moon, Nelson, Piercy, 1993; Moon & Thomas, 2003) have been very outspoken regarding the need to investigate the efficacy of family counseling interventions with gifted populations. In an effort to provide a working framework to conceptualize and intervene with gifted children and their families, Moon, Nelson, and Piercy offered an integrated approach to family therapy that incorporated: *family life cycle* (Catern & McGoldrick, 1988), *structural-strategic* (Haley, 1988; Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981), and the *psychology of talent*

*development* (Bloom, 1985; Colangelo & Davis, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Tannenbaum, 1983). Their integrative perspective allows for differential interventions depending on client problems. For example, Moon and Hall recommend the use of psychoeducation to alleviate parental and stress regarding understanding the nature of giftedness; social and behavioral interventions for reversing underachievement; and a combination of psychoeducation, solution-focused problem-solving, and structural-strategic interventions with families of children with dual exceptionalities.

*Group counseling skills.* Colangelo (1991) noted that most gifted people tend to “hide” who they are, for the sake of fitting into their environment. Thus, group counseling provides a forum to discuss, in a safe and open atmosphere, where these clients can be themselves, and realize that they are not alone (i.e., experience universality). Group counseling also provides a structure by which gifted clients can not only share experiences (i.e., impart information), but also learn from others struggling with similar issues (i.e., interpersonal learning). Yalom (1995) suggests that two types of disclosure facilitate this process: *vertical* and *horizontal* disclosures. Vertical disclosures provide greater in-depth discussions of the nature of the issues, whereas horizontal disclosures are less concerned with the details of the disclosure, but rather focus on the meta-issues, for example “what is it like to make the disclosure?” and “who in the group do you believe is most likely to relate with you/not relate with you?”

In their work with gifted children and adolescents, Colangelo and colleagues (e.g., Colangelo, 1991; Colangelo & Assouline, 2000; Colangelo &

Kerr, 1990; Kerr & Collangelo, 1988) have suggested several topics counselors can use to generate group participation. Colangelo and Assouline summarized and commented on the questions:

- 1) What does it mean to be gifted? We have found exciting and varied discussions generated by such a question. Students will see it in different ways. Questions that help elaborate this topic are:
  - (1a) What do your parents think it means to be gifted?
  - (1b) What do your teachers think it means to be gifted?
  - (1c) What do other kids in school think it means?
- 2) How is being gifted an advantage for you? How is it a disadvantage?
- 3) Have you ever deliberately hidden your giftedness? If so, how?
- 4) How is your participation in this group different from your regular school day?
- 5) Would you rather be a gifted boy? Gifted girl? What does it mean to be gifted and Latino? Students will find it stimulating to discuss such issues. Also, they will achieve much better insight into gender and ethnic issues.
- 6) Is there a time in school (elementary, middle, high school) when it is easiest to be gifted? Most difficult? Why? The foregoing questions are by no means exhaustive and they will lead to other related questions and directions. (p. 599)

In addition to providing an outlet for self-expression and validation of gifted experiences, group counseling, because of its nature, lends itself to addressing

interpersonal challenges. Specifically, groups can facilitate the development of socialization techniques and provide opportunities for interpersonal learning through member feedback and practice (Yalom, 1995). Also, Yalom stresses that the group is a microcosm for the clients other systemic relationships. Thus group interventions are appropriate for addressing challenges related to identity issues, eccentricity, and managing the expectations of others.

*Career counseling skills.* The most written about career or vocational counseling issues related to gifted and talented individuals is multipotentiality (Colangelo & Assouline, 2000). Some of the primary concerns with multipotentiality, as it relates to career concerns include: a) difficulty narrowing career options due to multiple viable options; b) outside pressure to pursue high status (or high earning) career; c) necessity to make long term commitments to education and training (i.e., graduate or professional school) even in the face of confusion about career path or other decisions related to other priorities (i.e., starting a family); and d) perfectionist tendencies (i.e., looking for the “perfect” career) (Rysiew, Shore, & Leeb, 1999). These concerns illustrate the interconnectedness of intra- and interpersonal challenges faced by talented people. Depending on how congruent one’s career goals are with the expectations of others, as well as with one’s own self-concept, a student could find her- or himself struggling with challenges such as depression and serious relational problems in addition to multipotentiality.

Although most educators of the gifted and talented endorse the concept of multipotentiality, a serious challenge has been offered by Achter, Lubinski, and

Benbow (1996) and Archer, Benbow, and Lubinski (1997). Achter et al.(1996) found in a large sample of gifted adolescents widely varying patterns of abilities and interests. They suggest that the problem lies not within the person (i.e., multipotentiality), but rather in the theoretical framework in which talented individuals abilities and interests are conceptualized. They suggest that the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Lofquist & Dawis, 1991) provides an extremely useful model for addressing the educational and vocational needs of gifted adolescents (Achter, Lubinski, & Benbow, 1996; Lubinski & Benbow, 2000).

Several practical suggestions have been offered to aid in career counseling with gifted and talented clients (Colangelo & Assouline, 2000; Rysiew et al., 1999). One suggestion is to explore one's career as a lifestyle or way of life rather than a job. Also, a person does not have to be limited to one career, but as one develops, may change career focus and direction. In addition, other interests and skills that one possesses may manifest in terms of leisure activities separate from one's career. Finally, career counseling should not be used simply as a job placement services, but should be a "value-based activity, exploring broad categories of life satisfaction." (Colangelo & Assouline, p. 598).

*Individual counseling skills.* Relative to other counseling approaches (i.e., group and family therapy), individual psychotherapy has received the least scholarly attention in its application with gifted and talented clients. Some of this lack of research emphasis could be due to fact that the majority of interventions specially targeted at gifted clients are directed at children and adolescents,

usually in a school or family context, and are studied by scholars interested in school psychology and gifted education. However, individual counseling and psychotherapy may also be utilized to address the therapeutic need of gifted and talented children.

The most commonly expressed therapeutic issue presented by gifted and talented clients, across all developmental levels, is depression (e.g., Jacobsen, 1999; Robinson, 1996; Weisse, 1990). Depression in gifted clients may be related not only to other intrapersonal challenges, such as perfectionism, but also may be related to interpersonal challenges, including managing the expectation of others and coping with negative stigmas, jealousy, and envy. Although no specific individual counseling intervention (or theory) has been investigated for its efficacy in addressing these challenges with a gifted population, several theories have been applied to treating depression. Two of the most effective counseling interventions applied to addressing depression are cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Elkin et al., 1989).

Both CBT and IPT offer systematic approaches to addressing intra- and interpersonal challenges of clients. A caution in applying these approaches with gifted children, however, is recognizing that gifted clients may appear vested in counseling, when in fact they are using their abilities to defend against experiencing the necessary pain that occurs during therapy. In our clinical experiences, we have found gifted clients to be very psychologically minded, and are quick to learn the “right” things to say. They may also intellectualize their

situations, without truly experiencing them. To date, no research has been conducted to investigate the prevalence of these reactions. Thus in addition to studying the efficacy of theoretical approaches with this population (i.e., outcome studies), process research may also yield important information regarding individual psychotherapy interventions with talented clients.

### *Consulting Skills with Gifted and Talented Children*

A competent counselor of the gifted and talented can serve as a resource to other professionals, as well as parents of gifted children. The majority of counselors (especially those not trained as school counselors) have no formal training in working with the gifted (Ford & Harris, 1995). In a consultant role, competent counselors can help improve the service delivery to gifted and talented clients by sharing their knowledge and expertise through program development targeted at helping professions, including counselors and teachers (e.g., Landrum, 2001). Similarly, competent counselors can develop programming or target outreach services to parents and other community members about the nature of giftedness and special talents.

Consulting opportunities are also available outside of formal education. Talented young performing artists and athletes often suffer from stress related to performance expectancies. Hays and Brown's (2004) book, *You're On!* *Consulting for Peak Performance*, is an excellent resource for counselors wishing to develop their consulting sub-competency.

### *Advocacy Skills with Gifted and Talented Children*

The old notion that “ignorance is bliss” relates to the final sub-competency we present: Advocacy. Competent counselors of the gifted and talented are not “ignorant” to the salient issues that gifted and talented children face.

Unfortunately, the systems in which gifted and talented children live and learn can be unaware of the needs of this sub-culture. Competent counselors advocate for gifted and talented children by attempting to identify institutional and educational policies and practices that may act as barriers to, discriminate against, or oppress gifted students (Sue & Sue, 2003). This can be a difficult process. The Winter 2003 issue of *Gifted Child Quarterly* focused on advocacy. Contributors to that issue offer excellent examples of the knowledge base, strategies, and needs of competent advocacy efforts.

### *Conclusion*

This paper introduced a model of multicultural counseling competence with gifted and talented children. As Sue and Sue (2003) noted, development of cultural competence is an “active, developmental, and ongoing process and that it is aspirational rather than achieved” (p. 18). As such, we posit that development of counseling competence with gifted and talented clients includes facets related to on-going: 1) counselor self-awareness, especially it relates to attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and values of culturally diverse gifted and talented students; 2) understanding and knowledge acquisition related to the psychological presentation of diverse gifted and talented children; and 3)

development of practical skills to aid in the counseling and other therapeutic and service oriented needs of children with special gifts and talents.

It is not uncommon for school counselors to be called upon to provide services to culturally diverse gifted and talented children. Unfortunately, very little, if any, attention is paid to needs of gifted students within many counselor preparation programs. It is hoped that this article will serve as a springboard to increase school counselors' interest and ability in identifying and addressing issues commonly faced by gifted students. In addition we encourage school counselors to take advantage of the excellent resources that exist to help in this regard, including professional associations that provide training and advocacy services (e.g., National Association for Gifted Children, Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students) and several high-quality books (Mendaglio & Peterson, 2007; Neihart et al., 2002).

As noted throughout the manuscript, while substantial strides have been made in addressing the counseling needs of gifted and talented children; there remains much more work (both scholarly and practical) to ensure competent practice with gifted and talented children. One area in need of more exploration is how counselor variables (i.e., demographic characteristic, attitudes, and perceptions) impact the process of counseling gifted and talented children. Also, more research on counseling interventions – especially individual interventions – are needed to ensure efficacious practice. Finally, continued efforts are needed to explore the interactions among multiple cultural identities on the life challenges of gifted and talented children.

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