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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Jean Peterson, Ph.D.— Purdue University



Greetings to you all— new members, continuing members, and C & G veterans. At the convention last fall, it was exciting to have representatives from each of these membership groups at our Counseling & Guidance work session and business meeting. Those attending contributed good suggestions and discussed new and enduring concerns. Division officers are currently at work addressing some of these issues.

pose of each of the NAGC Divisions, in general, is to serve an interest-based constituency. Division leaders process program proposals, monitor session attendance and quality, serve as a communication hub, are alert to pertinent developments in research and in society in general, and work to ensure that NAGC is responsive to Division concerns.

The leadership team is involved most significantly in organizing the convention program, but officers also have financial and other responsibilities, including representing the Division at a mid-year conference. Division members contribute input at Division meetings at NAGC and participate as proposal

For those of you who are new to our Division, and/or possibly new to NAGC, the pur-

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Division Leaders

**Chair:**  
**Jean Peterson**

**Chair-Elect:**  
**Sal Mendaglio**

**Secretary:**  
**Meredith Greene**

**Program Co-Chairs:**  
**Lori Flint**  
**Linda Long**

**Newsletter Editor:**  
**Katie Craven**

Please email the editor at [Katie\\_Craven@att.net](mailto:Katie_Craven@att.net) to receive this newsletter via email.

Test Phobia, Depression, and a Core Identity of Giftedness: Jason’s Story

Thomas S. Greenspon, Ph.D., LP, LMFT

Jason is a highly gifted college student who is headed toward a “hard science” degree and graduate study. He is widely read, highly computer proficient, and an avid rationalist. Jason is also depressed, anxious, prone to panic episodes, and subject to dark periods during which he physically injures himself. Jason is having difficulty making it to graduation. With panic episodes shortly before exams, he becomes so depressed that he is nonfunctional. It is then that he begins to contemplate self-injury. Although there are times when Jason wants to be rid of all the pain in his life, he is not literally suicidal (nevertheless, there is a concern he might fatally injure himself by accident). He has postponed exams and even dropped courses as a result of these episodes.

Jason is in the midst of therapy and is making progress; I describe his case briefly here (with certain details changed to protect his anonymity), to

illustrate some points I consider crucial in understanding and helping this gifted student.

When Jason was growing up, he was in a school environment which clearly did not meet his academic needs. Since there were few options available, Jason spoke frequently with his family about his discomfort at school, got support from them for sticking with it, and did most of his learning on his own. Jason was morbidly obese during all of his childhood, for which he was teased and humiliated constantly. Between the teasing and his feelings of alienation in a non-challenging intellectual environment, Jason’s life was hellish much of the time; were it not for his family’s continued belief in him, he may not have been able to endure this.

Jason has, as we all do, a central sense of identity. This commonly arises in a develop-

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## High Ability Appears to Have a Presence in the Standards for Counselor Preparation

Two years ago, Andy Mahoney, former chair of C & G, and Jean Peterson, current chair, independently began to strategize with the goal of effecting an important change in the standards for counselor preparation created by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP): including attention to giftedness in the training of counselors. Andy raised awareness within NAGC and C & G and communicated with the CACREP office. In order to make a solid case for altering preparation standards, Jean first conducted a survey of accredited school-counselor preparation programs in 2005 and found that there is very little attention to giftedness.

Only 62% of programs gave any attention at all in their entire preparatory program, and 47% devoted three or fewer contact hours. Such little emphasis on the overlay of characteristics associated with giftedness on social and emotional development, on both assets and burdens of high capability, and on the need for differential counseling responses suggests that school counselors may not understand or

respond appropriately to counseling concerns of those students. In addition, like other educators who may be unaware of complex affective concerns of gifted students, school counselors may have attitudes and biases that preclude trusting relationships and effective work with them.

Jean then wrote a detailed argument for the CACREP standards-revision committee, including specific requests to include references to high ability and giftedness in 26 separate standards. In the draft of the second revision of the standards, 7 standards now include references to “extreme ability” or “ability,” representing significant progress in raising counselor awareness of social, emotional, and career-development concerns of gifted school-age children and adolescents. Special populations are rarely noted in the standards, which tend to be general, and the references to high ability are therefore unusual. The alterations are in standards in the foundations and career-development sections.

### Doing Gifted the “Wright Way” in North Carolina



The National Association for Gifted Children will hold its 53rd annual convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, from November 1st—5th.

### Jason’s Story....continued from page 1

mental process involving important attachment figures: our sense of who we are and how we fit in with others is governed by the kinds of relational interactions we have with essential others from the earliest moments of our lives. Out of these relational patterns we develop a set of emotional convictions or organizing principles that shape our world of experience and determine our sense of reality. Jason’s family is quite bright and very supportive, though in both of his parents’ families there is a history of emotional disorders. His parents have also struggled with depression and alcohol dependence, and the resulting episodic and sometimes tumultuous emotional disconnections have left Jason with a sense of ever-threatening aloneness and fear. His intellect and his ability to achieve in school provided him with a solid thread of self-identity; this was a powerful stabilizing force but it could not in itself give him a sense of belonging or connection. In school, his differences from his classmates even threatened to turn this core identity into a negative one for him. Still worse, though, a poor grade would threaten not just Jason’s self esteem, but the major element of his self identity.

Jason’s anxiety and depression do have a biological component, so medications are a part of the picture, but the circumstances of his life are constitutive of his experience in essential ways. The complex process of his psychotherapy involves the establishment of a relationship with his therapist in which acceptance of Jason is consistent and is not conditional on his achieving anything. This in turn allows for the opening up of a new set of emotional convictions and an evolving self-identity. As we make our way together through this process, Jason’s core identity as a gifted student is coming to depend less on getting certain test scores, and more on a fundamental sense of himself as intellectually competent. Self injury, which may amount to his attempt to create a sense of agency in the face of periodic threats to his core identity, has begun to abate. Jason has also begun to see himself as more than just his intellect. Today, in therapeutic midstream, what characterizes Jason most is his resilience and his capacity for persistent self-reflection. That is his true gift.

## Message from the Chair... continued from page 1

reviewers, present special-focus sessions (e.g., the disaster-response session last fall) and other program sessions, and serve as consultants when counseling/guidance-oriented questions from NAGC members arise. I encourage you to attend the C & G convention work session and business meeting this fall, to submit program proposals in late winter, to support presenters by attending their sessions, to make us aware of your expertise, and to think about assuming leadership positions in C & G and NAGC.

Sal Mendaglio, chair-elect, and I attended the now-annual Division Leadership Retreat in Washington, DC, March 24-26. A major focus of the retreat was an examination of general Division structure. As you may have noticed last fall at the convention, there were some significant changes, including adding Division-information events and scheduling somewhat fewer program sessions. Next fall you will notice other changes in what is offered, when it is offered, and in what format. For example, market-place sessions will be replaced with "poster sessions," which are often familiar and numerous at other conventions. In addition, pre-convention Board and Division workshops will be somewhat different (e.g., C & G will be involved in a cross-division institute). There will also be "focus" sessions, and award-winners will make presentations.

### C & G Program-Proposal Review

The 2005 retreat familiarized us with the new NAGC electronic proposal-review system. While it offered considerable streamlining of procedures, we initially had some concerns. We wanted to make sure that the rather sophisticated system of the C & G Division could continue. The reviewers generally volunteer their services at the NAGC Division work session, and each year new reviewers are involved in the process. Katie Craven, who commendably moved an already sound blind-review system to a new level over her four years as program co-chair, certainly deserves much more than a few lines of gratitude in this column. She was scrupulously careful to arrange for three reviewers to critique each anonymous proposal, send similar-topic proposals to the same reviewers to encourage some degree of comparison, and have a review team that included a variety of constituent backgrounds.

Subsequently, Katie and her co-chairs logged attendance patterns at sessions, paid attention to audience evaluations, noted new and exciting voices, and even noted patterns of presenter absences. As a result, the C & G program quality has continued to improve, and the Division is proud of that accomplishment. Average C & G session attendance is typically among the highest among Divisions. C & G consistently receives 70-80 proposals per year, and program co-chairs continue to be encouraged to decrease the number of combined sessions, thereby decreasing the number of proposals accepted. I can testify to how arduous

that task is, based on my own two years as program co-chair. With assigned session slots increasingly limited, due to changes in convention schedule, that task becomes ever more challenging. When I recently checked some former convention programs in my office for the number of sessions listed for our Division (excluding marketplace sessions), I found a trend:

- 36 in 1998
- 35 in 2000
- 35 in 2002
- 33 in 2003
- 26 in 2004
- 22 in 2005

It should be noted, however, that because of the solid C & G session-attendance figures, our Division was invited to add to our allotted number of program sessions for this year.

In the past, C & G program co-chairs have limited the number of program sessions on a particular topic when multiple proposals were submitted with that focus. In addition, since few proposals may actually be designated by reviewers as a clear "accept" or "reject," resulting in a mid-range majority, the program co-chairs sometimes ultimately must make decisions. The need for this somewhat subjective rendering in the end has taught us that blind review and numerical rankings, while important and helpful, are not sufficient. These concerns were discussed at the Division Leadership Retreat last year and again this year.

### New Review Process

We have learned that the totally electronic process does allow Division to retain considerable control. In order to retain what has worked well, C & G decided that each proposal would continue to undergo blind review. At the end of the process, C & G co-chairs would submit ranked proposals to the NAGC program chair, after considering reviewers' rankings and sometimes after looking carefully at multiple proposals on similar topics. C & G co-chairs would also offer comments and suggestions as to room type, time, and, in some cases, session inclusion. It is assumed that the new system will prevent scheduling a presenter for two sessions at the same time, inappropriate room size for speakers who typically generate large audiences, and similar sessions presented by more than one Division.

Safeguards were sufficiently in place to ensure that the new system worked reasonably well this year—as long as Divisions performed their various programs tasks by the given deadlines. Nevertheless, we encourage you to provide feedback concerning proposal review and selection and quality to C & G leadership at our work session or business meeting next year at the convention.

# Managing His Image: The Challenge Facing a Gifted Male\*

Thomas P. Hébert, PhD. — The University of Georgia

Gabe was producing as little as possible in his middle school classes. Teachers reported this gifted young man was doing just enough to get by. Parents were also concerned with his lack of enthusiasm for school. He was a skateboarding enthusiast and daredevil whose interest in this sport encompassed his life. Gabe was 14 years old and lived in a small suburban community. Dressed in colorful skateboarder clothing, he was often seen on his skateboard, scaling the walls of the local shopping mall. Gabe was bright, handsome, personable, charismatic, and had a following of male friends and a constant circle of admiring middle school females who suffered “major crushes.”

Mr. Johnson, Gabe’s enrichment program teacher shared his opinion concerning Gabe’s lack of progress. He had seen a side of Gabe others had not. Gabe had always been concerned with his image. Mr. Johnson had planned an exciting field trip to Washington D.C. The eighth grade class, including Gabe, had spent the year involved in fund-raising activities to cover student expenses. Two weeks before departure, Mr. Johnson became aware that a problem was emerging among the young men in the enrichment class. Several of the boys had quietly announced that Gabe had chosen not to participate in the field trip and they too would not be going. They claimed they were not interested in visiting Washington, explaining that it was simply “not a cool trip.”

Mr. Johnson held a private conversation with Gabe and discovered that he suffered from severe motion sickness and simply could not tolerate the idea of a 15-hour long bus ride to the nation’s capital. The possibility of being physically sick while in the company of his peers was totally unacceptable to this well-respected young man. Although he realized that his decision to withdraw from the trip was influencing his friends and he sympathized with Mr. Johnson, the popular “skateboard king” had an image to protect and chose not to travel to Washington.

Ben was faced with a different situation. This young man enjoyed alternative music and had changed his collared polo shirts, docksiders and khakis for oversized cargo pants, heavy boots, and sweatshirts. He was a champion backstroke swimmer for his inner-city high school swim team. He was known for his lively comical antics when he and his teammates were introduced at pep rallies. Ben was a gifted student who was underachieving in all subjects except creative writing. Ben’s lack of enthusiasm for school had been a cause for parental concern for months. Anecdotal comments on recent report cards had read “not working up to potential.” Teachers began to ask questions and the swim team coach was alerted. An academic awards assembly was to be held and Ben knew that he would be receiving an award for creative writing in front of an audience of fifteen hundred students. The young man who was ready to accept the adulation of the pep rally crowd, could not face the possibility of having to walk across the stage of his high school auditorium

to be recognized as the creative writing award recipient. Instead, he chose to skip the awards assembly, and spent the time hiding in the men’s locker room.

In both cases, the behaviors of these bright young men would be attributed in part to their desire to maintain an image. Gifted males concerned with image management issues may become academic underachievers if their adolescent culture does not value academic success (Hebert, 2001; Kerr & Cohn, 2001). Bright young men like Gabe and Ben may do poorly in school, not simply because they aren’t motivated to study, but because they are intent on maintaining their status in a peer group that regards academic achievement as uncool. Maintaining their image may require decisions that are detrimental to long term adjustment. Gifted males may be forced to mask their true identities to survive in a macho teenage male culture (Pollack, 2000).

The masculine mystique and value system comprise a set of beliefs that defines what our society regards as masculine. These values are learned early in childhood and may be based on rigid gender role beliefs. One feature of this masculine mystique is the belief that vulnerability, weakness and academic success in school are signs of femininity to be avoided at all costs (O’Neil, 1981). For young men like Gabe and Ben, being in control is often essential to proving one’s masculinity, even if it means missing out on an exciting class trip or recognition at an academic awards assembly.



## How can we help?

There are a number of strategies that educators, counselors, or parents may want to consider implementing to change the underachieving behaviors in gifted boys due to issues of image. The role of image could easily become a topic for a discussion group with gifted males. With the help of an empathic teacher, young men may be able to provide each other with support to cope with a peer group that does not value their intellectual abilities. Another strategy, the use of biographies of gifted men who faced this issue in school, may also be helpful to gifted teenagers. Teacher or counselor-guided classroom discussions centered on the biographies can provide gifted young men with new insights and strategies to deal with a macho culture that is unappreciative of their talents (Hebert, 1995). Exposing gifted teenage males to role models in a school setting may motivate them to assume a more appropriate image. Inviting successful men from the community as guest speakers on this topic may be helpful. Men who are achieving professionally may have

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## C & G Leaders Address Mental-health Issues at DISCOVER! Institute

Sal Mendaglio, who will assume the chair position of Counseling & Guidance at the NAGC convention, Susan Jackson, nominee for program co-chair, and Jean Peterson, current division chair, were presenters at the now-annual Gifted Education Resource Center's DISCOVER! Institute at Purdue University for the second time in late June. It is a stimulating four-day event that focuses on addressing the needs of gifted school-age individuals. The special role of the C & G leadership team is to address concerns related to social and emotional development.

On the final day, interested participants joined the C&G leaders to hear about the C & G Division, to learn about the role of Divisions in NAGC, and to conduct an informal work session, during which anyone could pose questions about areas of concern. Each of the past two years, through this meeting, the C & G leadership team has learned a great deal about what matters to parents, teachers, and other professionals who work with gifted kids.

The most extensive discussion was related to diagnosis, misdiagnosis, the long-term effects of diagnostic labeling, and political implications of labeling. Discussion participants mentioned personal and professional experiences related to these areas—being able to receive help because of the diagnosis, wondering whether diagnoses were accurate (e.g., “geek syndrome” looking like Aspergers; psychic overexcitabilities, such as talking fast, seen as attention-deficit with hyperactivity), not being able to be “undiagnosed” as adults, realizing that diagnostic labels guide the counseling process, and the label being used to absolve teachers of responsibility for making changes that might help a child in the classroom (e.g., “He’s got Aspergers. There’s nothing I can do.”).

One participant shared her strategy for ensuring that she meets the needs of individual students, including those with diagnoses. At the end of each week, she uses a grid to check whether she believes she taught in ways that addressed each child’s learning needs. Another participant routinely asks, when checking out mental-health professionals, what the clinician understands about giftedness. If there is hesitation, or a stated lack of background, she moves down the list.

The C & G consultants made several points in response to the concerns.

- Educators often use diagnostic labels loosely and informally, not aware that the labels refer to psychiatric medical disorders (“something wrong with the brain”), rather than something that is primarily an educational concern. Diagnoses are based on clinical observations, with medication commonly the result.
- It probably is advisable to attempt first to rectify behaviors through fine-tuning parenting for a few months before moving to diagnosis and medical treatment. A counselor can guide this process.
- The counseling process, regardless of diagnosis or no diagnosis, is built on a relationship, and the basic approach may be somewhat similar across presenting issues (in terms of assisting with development, paying attention to the individuals and to significant persons in their lives, and helping clients take steps to live more effectively). When a diagnosis is needed for insurance purposes, “adjustment disorder,” including “unspecified,” can be listed instead of more severe and pejorative labels.

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### Managing His Image...continued from page 4

suggestions for younger men who are troubled with the role of image. In addition, these successful professionals may serve as mentors to gifted males who may need the guidance and friendship of a caring adult role model. These adults can relate how they felt as bright adolescents and how they dealt with similar issues related to fitting into a macho culture. A creative teacher working with a counselor and parents may want to try several of these strategies to assist gifted males. With the help of caring adults, bright young men will begin to realize that the role of image need not be a challenge.

*\*Originally published on the SENG website.*

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## C & G Work Session and Business Meeting to be Combined at NAGC



The previously separate C & G work session and business meeting will be combined this year, according to new NAGC program guidelines. The joint meeting has been scheduled for

**Thursday, November 2nd, from 2:00-4:30**

We hope you plan your flight so that you can attend part or all of this meeting. More information about the C & G program sessions and other events will appear in the next newsletter.

### C& G Leaders....continued from page 5

- There is considerable emphasis on assessment, yet sometimes there is no guidance after the diagnosis is made. Some counselors de-emphasize formal assessment, instead listening to the child, empowering the child to make changes, focusing on solutions, and building a working relationship with the child.
- An important question is “How will the label help a teacher transform the teacher-student relationship and do something different in order to help the child?”
- Educators and parents should make sure that psychiatrists and psychologists understand the implications of giftedness for behavior, learning, and emotional development.
- Sometimes a medication is prescribed to “see if it works.” If it does, then the diagnosis is made accordingly. This practice contributes to unneeded medicating and potential side effects. It may occur before other strategies are explored in the classroom and in the home.
- Only one counselor-preparation program has attention to giftedness as a significant part of the curriculum (The University of Iowa), and that part of the program is only just beginning to evolve. A recent survey found that programs generally give very little attention to giftedness.
- Learning disabilities may be interfering with gifted students’ writing, reading, and math. Often, simply asking the student about how they learn and about what causes problems for them is enough to guide strategies,

although special-education personnel may need to help classroom teachers make adjustments. They are experts in alternative teaching approaches and, even if the child is not diagnosed, and therefore not their responsibility, they probably can offer some guidance.

- It is helpful if mental-health professionals are acquainted with Dabrowski’s theories.

The classroom teacher is a key person in the process of addressing student concerns. The teacher should talk with the child about what is going on—and how he/she views the situation. Too often, no one talks with the child. Teachers should trust their instincts and be mindful of their role. If a referral is made, they should make sure the professionals involved are confirming or disconfirming their observations as a teacher.”

The group discussed roles and training of school counselors, including the reality that currently 73% of new school counselors in accredited programs have not been teachers. Only a few states still require teacher training, and therefore counselor preparation has had to adjust curriculum accordingly, particularly in regard to navigating the always-complex school culture. Nevertheless, new school counselors’ training is similar to the training of mental-health counselors, and non-teachers, because they are not wedded to familiar roles for counselors, may be able to move job descriptions toward fewer clerical and state-testing responsibilities, more prevention-oriented and developmental programming, and more attention to responsive services related to social and emotional development.



A note from the editor..... Katie Craven

*I have taken a new road in life, leaving my college counseling position at a high school to help my oldest son pursue his dreams. He has chosen to attend the University of Northern Colorado, which is 1000 miles of driving from my home in Phoenix. He is starting college at the age of 15, so I will be taking a college class to allow us to have a 2 bedroom apartment in university housing. After a couple of semesters, I will return to Phoenix. Radical acceleration isn't the right choice for every child, but my son has benefited immensely from the opportunity to accelerate his schooling. I knew when he started reading at the age of 2 that my life would be different than I had ever imagined. With the help of everything I have learned from the multitude of NAGC resources and attendance at many yearly conventions, I have found a path that works for my family. After helping my oldest son establish himself in college, I will give my younger son the same opportunity. Thanks to all of you who have helped me find the right road for my sons.*

## CONGRATULATIONS...



Jean Peterson, Counseling and Guidance Division chair, received the Early Scholar Award at the NAGC convention in November. The award recognizes scholars for up to 10 years of post-Ph.D work. Though Jean's publications span the areas of gifted education, school counseling, and counselor education, more than half are related to the social and emotional development of gifted children and adolescents. Some have helped to acquaint other fields with concerns related to giftedness.

Most of her research involves qualitative methods, and several of her studies have been longitudinal, following students for several years. Directly related to exploring giftedness are 3 books, 18 refereed and 11 non-refereed articles, and 12 chapters in edited books, most of which reflect her interest in exploring the inner world of both stereotypical and non-stereotypical gifted kids. The latter are those who are under-identified, under-served, culturally or socio-economically non-mainstream, and/or under-studied. Her scholarly work has also been the basis for 140 national, regional, and state presentations.

## Nominations for Election of Officers

Chair-elect Sal Mendaglio will begin the leadership transition in July, assuming the chair position at the NAGC convention. Program co-chairs, newsletter editor, and web master will continue in their offices for 2006.

At the C & G business meeting at the convention, new officers were nominated to begin responsibilities at this year's NAGC convention. Meredith Greene, Connie Phelps, and Susan Jackson and Vicky Moyle were nominated for the offices from which individuals will be retiring.

Please clip this section of the newsletter and send additional nominations to Jean Peterson at the address below, or email her, by September 1st. More information on the upcoming election of officers will be published in the October newsletter.

### Nominations:

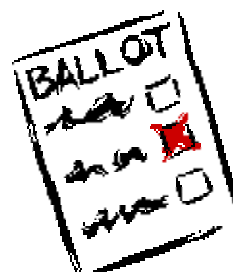
Chair-elect:  
Meredith Greene

Secretary-Treasurer  
Connie Phelps

Program Co-Chairs  
Susan Jackson & Vicky Moyle

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## Division Sponsored Institutes

On Wednesday, November 1st, from 8:30 until 4:30 pm, the various divisions will be sponsoring institutes at the NAGC Convention. Pre-registration is required and the cost is \$149, which includes continental breakfast, lunch, and materials. There are seven different institutes. The following topic is co-sponsored by the Counseling & Guidance Division.

### *Sensitivity and Excitability: Applying Dabrowski's Theory to Practice in Teaching, Counseling, and Psychology*

*Jointly sponsored by the Conceptual Foundations, Counseling & Guidance, and Global Awareness Divisions.*

Parents, teachers, and counselors often describe sensitivity and excitability as hallmark traits of gifted children. So, too, parents, teachers, counselors, and psychologists often seek resources and strategies for better understanding and supporting the developmental paths of these intense gifted children. The work of Kazimerz Dabrowski, a well known Polish psychologist and psychiatrist who studied the emotional development of intellectually, creatively, and artistically gifted individuals for nearly five decades, provides insight for greater understanding of their psychological and emotional development. He found that intensity is central to the psychological make-up of the gifted and identified five forms of mental functioning, called overexcitabilities, that contribute to their developmental potential. This pre-conference institute connects Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration to current research with gifted children along with practical applications for teachers, counselors, and school psychologists. Specifically, (1) a new instrument for assessing overexcitabilities in elementary aged students will be presented, (2) characteristics and qualities of overexcitabilities, the variety of forms of their expression, and the potential they hold for both misunderstanding and potential misdiagnosis of the gifted will be highlighted, and (3) a curriculum for teaching gifted students about the theory will be presented along with strategies for teachers and parents to help manage and nurture the intensity of the gifted. An extensive resource packet will be included. And an hour in the afternoon will provide time for small-group discussion on specific topics with the institute presenters who will further elaborate practical applications for teachers, counselors, and psychologists.

### *Counseling & Guidance Division*

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