Lost Prizes: Manitoban and International Initiatives to Identify and Develop the Talents of At-Risk Populations

Ken W. McCluskey
with
Philip A. Baker, Mike Bergsgaard, Lenna Glade, Kevin Lamoureux, Andrea L. A. McCluskey, and Alan C. Wiebe
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Since there was no point continuously reinventing the wheel, we have, at times—with permission from the Center for Creative Learning, the Creative Problem Solving Group, Inc., the International Centre for Innovation in Education, Reclaiming Youth International, and the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children—borrowed from ourselves in preparing this monograph. In particular, some of the material here was drawn from the following publications:

McCluskey, K. W. (in press). Nurturing the talents of at-risk children and youth: Issues to consider when reaching out to lost prizes. In H. E. Vidergor, C. R. Harris, & T. S. Yamin (Eds.), The practical handbook for teaching gifted and able learners. Ulm, Germany: International Centre for Innovation in Education.


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Lost Prizes: Manitoban and International Initiatives to Identify and Develop the Talents of At-Risk Populations

An Introduction

“It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.” Albert Einstein

Back in the early 1990s, three rural Manitoba school divisions—Lord Selkirk, Interlake, and Agassiz (now Sunrise)—launched the Lost Prizes project to reclaim at-risk, talented individuals who had dropped out of high school. Their talent notwithstanding, the youth in question were alienated and essentially lost to the system. Most were doing nothing and going nowhere. At best, they were floating aimlessly; at worst, they had run seriously afoul of the law. Substance abuse was prevalent. The initiative represented an attempt to reconnect with these young people, encourage them to examine other life paths, and awaken their dormant creative potential.

To summarize, during the first phase of Lost Prizes, a facilitator worked directly with the participants in an off-site classroom. The training sessions featured a combination of Creative Problem Solving, career awareness, differentiated instruction, and a variety of other strength-based interventions for youth empowerment from the enrichment and at-risk domains. Using a toolbox of problem-solving strategies, the re-engaged students learned to map out individual growth plans, make better choices, and move from a stagnant present to a more productive future. And in the second phase of the program, they gained experience through on-the-job placements that gave them an opportunity to encounter and address some real-world problems with mentors drawn from local businesses.

Outcome measures demonstrated that Lost Prizes accomplished its purpose by helping many former dropouts turn things around. Other related projects from 1992 to 1999 were successful as well: Northern Lights improved graduation and employment rates among at-risk Aboriginal students, Second Chance reduced recidivism among inmates from First Nation communities, and Prism increased the self-awareness and achievement of troubled youth.

By the start of the new millennium, however, several of the originators of Lost Prizes and its derivative projects had made their way from the schools to positions in the Faculty of Education at the University of Winnipeg (UW). Gradually, they began to collaborate with new colleagues there who were also interested in enrichment and talent development. A serendipitous “happening” occurred when the Executive Committee of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC) chose to locate its headquarters at UW from 2005 through 2010. This not-for-profit organization, with members from more than 60 countries worldwide, provides
opportunities for gifted and talented children and youth across the globe, supports the parents, educators, and researchers who work with them, and disseminates information via its website, publications, and conferences. Its World Conference, held every two years in a different country, is perhaps the major networking event for international scholars and practitioners in the field. Naturally, with the headquarters on its campus, faculty and staff from the University of Winnipeg became very involved, writing professional articles for the organization’s newsletter (World Gifted) and journal (Gifted and Talented International), editing and contributing to books of proceedings, and presenting at the biennial conferences. Even though the headquarters has moved on to Western Kentucky University for its current five-year term, UW personnel remain committed to the WCGTC, with some continuing to serve in significant positions within the organization.

Of late, there has been growing interest and action from World Council members who are committed to improving the lot of neglected high-ability young people on the fringe, whose talents all too often go unrecognized and untapped. Given the history and interconnectedness, it is not surprising that—over the course of the last few years—those of us from the original Lost Prizes crew have joined with others at UW to pick up on the opportunity presented by being wired into this global network and to develop a new generation of programs locally and internationally.

One central goal of this monograph is to review Lost Prizes and spinoff projects, both old and new, in some detail, so that others might adapt relevant portions of the undertakings for use in their own settings. The hope is that, by improving the talent identification and development process, combining best practices in at-risk and gifted education, and building the skills of those working with marginalized populations, it will be possible for teachers and other caregivers to reach out more effectively to the many vulnerable children and youth who, if engaged, have so much to offer.

Building on a Research Base

Another related overarching goal of this work is to highlight the importance of reflective inquiry, practice, and research. Although the programs discussed here were designed as front-line, in-the-trenches service delivery interventions to reach and redirect disenfranchised students, they have all been based upon theory and models thoroughly grounded in the literature. In our smorgasbord of projects, we have consistently made ongoing attempts to carry out action research in the best sense of the term by gathering outcome data, measuring and evaluating results objectively, following up, and adjusting as appropriate.
Again, the intent is to share our total-package approach and findings with others who are striving to engage and make a difference in the lives of disadvantaged individuals. To that end, in this publication we will endeavour to address and connect the following topics:

- the challenges and cost of underachievement
- clarifying “at-risk” terminology
- basic principles of intervention
- foundational models that have guided the Lost Prizes approach
- blended programmatic elements from the enrichment and at-risk perspectives
- a review of Manitoba programs (e.g., the first Lost Prizes project, Northern Lights, Second Chance, Prism, and mentoring initiatives)
- the evolving Lost Prizes model
- emerging international centres, programs, and schools

A Conceptual Framework

In developing Lost Prizes and other projects, we were guided in our efforts by established bodies of gifted/talented and at-risk research, well-known models for intervention, and some specific approaches and programs. The following material was particularly applicable.

Defining the Challenges of Underachievement

“We waste our lights in vain, like lamps by day.” William Shakespeare

Underachievement—the shortfall between expected and actual performance (Reis & McCoach, 2000)—is a complex, galling phenomenon (Baslanti & McCoach, 2006; Gallagher, 1985; Matthews & McBe, 2007; McCluskey & Walker, 1986; Rimm, 1986, 1995; Whitmore, 1980). And the frustration is compounded when the underachievers are known to possess special talents. Several investigators have identified categories of young people who are most likely to fall into the trap of drug and alcohol abuse, engage in criminal activity, and/or drop out of school (Betts & Neihart, 1988; Neihart, 2011). Without doubt, there are many high-ability young people who see the educational curriculum as irrelevant (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995; McCluskey, 2000a), march to the beat of their own drummer (Sisk, 2003), and run afoul of the system by acting out, challenging authority, and refusing to obey “the rules.” From their point of view, schools are unfeeling places with inflexible attendance and discipline policies that push nonconformists out the door (Brendtro & Shahbazian, 2004; Kohn, 2006; Radwanski, 1987). Students dismissed as underachievers, disruptive influences, and basic ne’er-do-wells by teachers may well develop confrontational behaviours to live up to the negative expectations (Freado, 2011; Mukhopadyay & Chugh, 1979). Undeniably, it can also be difficult for educators
to meet the diverse needs of students who exhibit different types of abilities or “intelligences” that do not fit comfortably into the material typically covered by the traditional school curriculum (Feldhusen, 1995; Gardner, 2000; Goleman, 1995; Sternberg, 1996, 2000).

Many young people are somehow falling through the cracks and being lost to their schools. Indeed, at the time the original *Lost Prizes* planning was underway, a report by Statistics Canada (1991) made it clear that talented students can be very much at risk—they frequently become bored, discouraged, negative, and unproductive. In that StatsCan investigation, more than 30% of the dropouts surveyed had maintained averages of A or B, and only 8% identified academic problems as their reason for leaving school. Most indicated that “not belonging” was the major issue. This finding was consistent with other work, which also reported that many who drop out mention feeling isolated (Fortune, Bruce, Williams, & Jones, 1991).

These results are rather alarming, for isolation, rejection, and resentment are poor and dangerous companions—witness the horrors perpetrated by some youth (all too often labelled as the nerds, geeks, or dweebs) who have been subjected to prolonged ridicule and bullying because they did not fit in. Be that as it may, there is very little support for relationship-resistant, “tough bright” students, who rarely find their way into gifted programs typically populated mostly by teacher pleasers (Peterson, 1997). Quite simply, the lack of enrichment opportunities for talented but noncompliant, at-risk students has become a matter of grave concern in many quarters (Betts & Neihart, 1988; Bowd, 2003; Brendtro & Shahbazian, 2004; Heckenlaible-Gotto, 2006; McCluskey & Treffinger, 1998; Neihart, 2011). Sadly, there are even some law-and-order-type educators who, intentionally or otherwise, draw lines in the sand to push such troubled and troubling children and youth out of their buildings (McCluskey, 2000a).

**The Cost of Things Gone Wrong**

“Starvation, and not sin, is the parent of modern crime.” *Oscar Wilde*

Widespread educational underachievement carries with it some pronounced personal costs. Since those who have dropped out of high school generally have difficulty obtaining and holding jobs, their overall quality of life is affected: Many are forced to accept mundane, low-paying positions that offer little satisfaction or opportunity for advancement. Further, because unemployed or under-employed individuals tend to be less happy, less motivated, and less effective decision makers than their better-educated counterparts, they usually function well below potential (Levin, 1989). Often, social problems and upheaval result. Specifically, unemployment has been linked to decreased self-esteem, increased need for mental health care, and a rise in suicide and mortality rates (Gage, 1990).
Information we examined two decades ago during the development of many of our projects indicated that there was a societal price to be paid as well the personal one. In the U.S., for example, it was estimated that those who dropped out of the graduating class of one large urban school district missed out on some $200 billion in earnings over a lifetime, resulting in more than $60 billion in lost taxes (Catterall & Cota-Robles, 1988).

In Canada, many current studies continue to document the costs. While the dropout rate has actually declined in all provinces during the past two decades, the problem remains serious. Without doubt, leaving school early restricts opportunities and increases “the probability of a life marred by lengthy bouts of unemployment and poverty” (Richards, 2011, p. 1). The average employment rate for dropouts in our country is below 40%; high school graduates tend to fare much better (Richards & Scott, 2009). And even when they were employed full-time (by no means a given for many), dropouts earned on average $70 less per week in 2009–2010 than their peers with Grade 12 diplomas (Gilmore, 2010). Further, a recent report has shown that the high-school dropout problem costs our Canadian social assistance and criminal justice programs in excess of $1.3 billion annually (Hankivsky, 2009). As is usually the case, the bulk of this outlay represents after-the-fact reactive costs, rather than preventative interventions. Besides, although it may not be quantifiable, there is also the social cost of what might have been: “What is the ‘cost’ of a symphony unwritten, a cure not discovered, a breakthrough not invented? In today’s complex world, and in preparing for tomorrow’s certainly more complex one, we can scarcely afford to waste ‘talent capital’ of any sort” (McCluskey & Treffinger, 1998, p. 216). Investing in the development of the creative and innovative skills of our gifted and talented students is likely to foster “political stability, economic growth, scientific and cultural enrichment, psychological health, and the general prosperity of any society in the 21st century” (Shavinina, 2009, p. vii).

Lack of productivity may just be the tip of the iceberg, for young people blocked from positive attention and legitimate paths to success are apt to turn their attention toward unsavoury pursuits. Indeed, lacking support and left to “make it on their own,” some at-risk youth move in decidedly antisocial directions. A major conclusion that arose from the First World Conference of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children in London, England, in 1975 was that high-ability students with unmet needs might well become serious problems. There was, in fact, speculation that many unsolved crimes have likely been committed by bright individuals, who made it on their own all right, but not precisely in a socially desirable manner (cf. McCluskey & Walker, 1986): The “success” they experienced came at the expense of others and society in general. The possibility of misdirected talent is, for us, an important reason to build the teaching of morality, ethics, and values into gifted programming (Ambrose & Cross, 2009; Ambrose, Sternberg, & Sriraman, 2011).
Sensitive parents and educators know that high-potential gifted young people have some very unique social, emotional, and academic needs (Jolly, Treffinger, Inman, & Smutny, 2011; Peterson, 2009). If those needs are not met, talent suppressed in one setting (such as school) might surface in another (on the streets). Agnew (1989) argued that delinquency could well be a creative outlet for certain teens, and Staff (2008) has found that disadvantaged boys can gain status with their peers through membership in violent groups. Relatedly, in a chapter some years back entitled “Youth Gangs: Cesspool or Talent Pool?,” members of our team examined the notion that youth with promising potential might, if things go awry, seek and attain leadership positions in gangs (Baker, McCluskey, & McCluskey, 2003). The issue hits close to home in Winnipeg, where youth gangs have expanded noticeably during the past few years—the city’s Police Service has identified some 26 gangs with a total membership of over 2,000 (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2006). Although joining a youth gang is usually a personally destructive route to follow—and downright evil at times—not just anyone can do it successfully. Many gang activities require ingenuity, skill, and perseverance. Rather than deny, ignore, or avoid such underground talent, it makes sense for educators to acknowledge and redirect it.

It must be noted that poverty is clearly at the root of many of society’s problems. In one examination of talented dropouts in U.S. schools, for example, 48.18% were found to fall in the bottom quartile socio-economic level, while only 3.56% were in the top quartile (Renzulli & Park, 2000). Locally, in 2009 in Manitoba, 32.6% of children (i.e., 92,650 youngsters and adolescents under 18 years of age) were living in poverty, a rate 10% higher than the Canadian norm (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2011). And this inequality looms large as a causal factor in poor physical and mental health, low self-esteem, educational underachievement, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and crime, violence, and sexual assault (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). In their most recent Child and Family Poverty Report Card, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg (2011) gave our province a failing grade.

Clarifying “At Risk”

“Not art, not books, but life itself is the true basis of . . . education.”
Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi

The designation “at-risk student” became popular shortly after the U.S. was identified as a “nation at risk” by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). Many consider it to be controversial, and prefer instead terms such as disadvantaged, disconnected, marginalized, unengaged, and vulnerable. For the most part, our service delivery and research teams employ “all of the above” more or less interchangeably. However, because there is such a large body of literature under the heading, we have not abandoned “at-risk” per se, but we use it with a proviso or clarification.
According to many researchers, risk factors include living in the inner city, being male, coming from a separated family, minority group membership, strained financial circumstances, and transience (cf. Freado, 2011; Van Bockern, 2012; Vito & Connell, 1988). However, one can understand how an Aboriginal single mother residing in poverty with her young son in Winnipeg’s inner city might not be totally enamoured of such a definition. Obviously, for those trapped in unfortunate life circumstances, it is extremely pessimistic and biased. It also ignores or masks variations within groups: Some children from affluent two-parent families in the ritzy part of town might be very much at risk, while that single mother eking out a living in the core area of the city may well be an exemplary parent who encourages and supports educational achievement, models appropriate behaviour, and provides a loving, stimulating home for her son. Challenges, yes; inevitable risk, not necessarily.

Curwin (1999) has observed that it is what parents and children do—not their culture, ethnic background, or place of residence—that determines the degree of risk. Behaviour, rather than simply life circumstances, is the issue. And behaviour can be changed—even the extremely antisocial, recalcitrant behaviour so often exhibited by relationship-resistant young people (Curwin, 2007; Levine & Levine, 1996). Thinking of “at risk” in this way is much more positive and optimistic, in that it immediately shifts the approach from deficit- to strength-based and causes us to consider possibilities rather than problems, setbacks rather than failures, and talent development rather than remediation (McCluskey, in press, a).

Incidentally, the fact that males are seen as being more at risk than females does not mean that young girls are immune. Of course, females can have significant issues as well, and some are decidedly vulnerable in many ways. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, boys are far more frequently flagged as “problems” than are girls, who tend to be more “invisible” and less likely to be identified, diagnosed, and labelled. Those of us who spend a lot of time in schools can hardly have failed to notice that boys tend to be far overrepresented in special education settings, where they typically make up 70% of the classes (Gunzelmann & Connell, 2006). The literature also indicates that boys are somewhere between three and ten times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than girls (Berry, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 1985; McCluskey & McCluskey, 2001; Szatmari, Offord, & Boyle, 1989), and that a marked gender gap in academic achievement exists in many subject areas (Gunzelmann & Connell, 2006), including reading (Katz & Sokal, 2003). Further, there is no doubt that school dropout rates are consistently higher for males than females (Richards, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2010). And although girls join and occasionally form their own gangs, they do so in far fewer numbers than males and usually play less prominent (once again, more “invisible”) roles (Nimmo, 2001). Still, it is very possible that troubled females are often simply overlooked. Educators must be vigilant to ensure that the needs of girls, which may be profound albeit less obvious, are not ignored.
In any case, Tonemah (1992), in his work with Native American students, has noted that teachers too frequently zero in on remedial programming at the expense of strength-building. Similarly, Torrance, Goff, and Satterfield (1998, p. vi) have challenged the idea that focusing on deficiencies develops appropriate behaviour in troubled students. On the contrary, they suggested that “giving attention to successful behavior motivates the attainment of potential. This means recognizing, acknowledging, and using their potential to build success, skills, and abilities rather than wasting energy and resources by focusing on their deficits and neglecting their strengths.”

For parents and educators concerned about just getting through each day with difficult children and youth, it is perhaps only natural to dwell on the downside, to bog down in problems, and to miss many of the positives. But it is essential to look beyond the day-to-day survival stage (McCluskey, in press, a). By reframing and viewing the world in a different light, we can often identify the strengths of problem kids. (Besides, it is infinitely easier to address the weaknesses if good things have been highlighted first.)

By “recasting reality,” so to speak, we are more likely to identify and respond to the strengths of challenging youngsters, and recognize that negatives in childhood can eventually turn into positives in adulthood (McCluskey & McCluskey, 2001). As children grow and mature, there can be a shift from stubbornness to determination, from disruptive fidgeting to productive energy, from bullying to leadership, from impulsivity to innovative risk taking, from daydreamy inattention to creative invention, and from off-the-wall chaos to outside-of-the-box thinking.

**Fundamental Principles of Intervention**

Taking an optimistic approach has a felicitous effect on how educators interpret and react to the behaviour of marginalized students. In our work, we have found several typically overlooked “glass-half-full” strategies to be useful with at-risk youth. The following three have been especially valuable.

**Remember that Kindness Matters**

“To feel compassion is to feel that we are in some sort and to some extent responsible for the pain that is being inflicted, that we ought to do something about it.” Aldous Huxley

It sounds simplistic, but it is not. With all the techniques, approaches, and programs available in the at-risk field, it is astounding to find how often educators and other caregivers neglect this basic method for reaching out to troubled youngsters. Nicholas Long (1997), one of the foremost scholars in the area, emphasized the “therapeutic power of kindness” when attempting to connect with troubled individuals. And many years earlier, Carl Jung (1954) stated that while curriculum may be the “raw material,” “warmth is the vital element” and “an understanding
heart is everything in a teacher.” Hard-line educators sometimes self-righteously proclaim, “The students don’t have to like you!” They are very much mistaken—relationship building matters a great deal, particularly when attempting to connect with disenfranchised, vulnerable students (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002; Pestalozzi, 1951). Demanding compliance and conformity can be stifling, and do we really want to medicate our Huckleberry Finns (Nylund, 2000) or to insist upon blind obedience at the expense of creativity?

“Niceness” is often the critical ingredient in engaging the unengageable (McCluskey, in press, b). Many isolated young people desperately need to be accepted, and a first step is to treat them kindly, even when they are reacting defensively and pushing everyone away. Not all gifts come nicely wrapped. Pedagogically, one of the great arts is to learn to treat disrespectful young people respectfully.

It would not be reasonable to expect relationship building with at-risk youth to be easy. Unengaged kids act up: That’s what they do. As Long (1997, p. 245) has put it, “Just as it is in the nature of lemons to be sour, it is in the nature of troubled students to behave in impulsive and primitive ways under certain conditions.” At-risk individuals did not become at-risk overnight; a lot of things happened for a long time to put them where they are. It is only reasonable, then, to assume that it will take plenty of work and commitment, over a considerable period of time, to help them turn things around. One has to view relationship building as a long-term “endurance event” (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002) and be prepared to hang in there for the long haul (McCluskey & Treffinger, 1998). In other words, as Fromm (1956) has said, relationship is not a feeling, but an action. If we hope to bond with at-risk kids, we have to get down into the trenches, become involved in their lives, and earn our place in their worlds (McCluskey & McCluskey, 2000).

Provide Opportunities for Altruism

“Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

With the best will in the world, some teachers actually build in too much support for at-risk children and youth: They offer tutoring, extra resource time, life skills, anger management training, and the like. Unfortunately, however, if struggling students are always the helpees and never the helpers, it can become subtly dehumanizing (McCluskey, 2000a).

For young people to learn responsibility, they must have an opportunity to practise it. Curwin (2007) has observed that one of the best ways for connecting with disadvantaged kids is to allow them to help others in genuine (not contrived) ways. He presented a real-life example, where an imposing Grade 6 bully changed his attitude markedly after being asked to tutor and protect a tiny, physically challenged boy in Grade 1. Teachers who give at-risk children the chance to help others are likely to see “growth” right before their eyes (witness how some challenging
youngsters blossom visibly when given the chance to run notes to the principal, work with younger students, or otherwise contribute in a meaningful manner).

Some of us have experienced this phenomenon first-hand (McCluskey, 2000a). Well over a decade ago, when we were enduring the “Flood of the Century” in our part of the world, it became necessary for our personnel to move all the files, books, computers, and so on from basement offices to higher ground upstairs in the school. Since the maintenance personnel were busy with other emergencies, we were expected to transfer all the material we had accumulated over a 20-year span by ourselves. As clinicians (who don’t do lifting), we were resentful. And by the end of the first moving day, we were also all exhausted from lugging an awful lot of heavy stuff. Luckily, there was a small elevator in the building, which was used for the sole purpose of transporting wheelchair-bound special needs children from floor to floor. Only the educational assistants and the principal had keys for the sacred, highly restricted lift. In light of our desperate plight, however, I—as chief administrator of the unit—was given a key and placed in charge of supervising each elevator run. Luckily for our group, teachers in the Centre upstairs extended a helping hand. Their program accommodated seriously at-risk, behaviourally disruptive students. It just so happened that, at the time, a group of senior years boys were being served. The Centre staff, sympathetic to our situation, freed up some of the kids to help us with the move. And goodness, were we ever glad to see them, for they were big, strong, and full of energy! Their eagerness to help was palpable; for a change, they were the altruistic saviours. After a spell, though, I became incredibly tired of having to run and open up the elevator for every load. Ergo, I called over one youngster who had been especially enthusiastic in his efforts, and handed him the magic key. His response: “You’re giving me the key to the elevator. Do you know who I am?” I assured him that I knew and that I felt he could handle the job. He beamed, his helping behaviour became even more pronounced, and he was much more “reachable” thereafter.

Albert Schweitzer had this to say about the importance of service: “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.” And service project possibilities abound through programs such as the Community Problem Solving component of the Future Problem Solving Program International (found at <www.fpspi.org>). As well, an abundance of literature highlights the value of service learning activities in empowering at-risk young people (Avenatti, Garza, Panico, & Students, 2007; Brendtro & du Toit, 2005; Brendtro, Mitchell, & McCall, 2009; Brendtro & Shahbazian, 2004; Cress, Collier, Reitenauer, & Associates, 2005; Kapp, 2009; Munter, 2002), including those who are academically talented (Webster & Worrell, 2008). And service is, of course, closely tied to the development of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1998, 2002).
Emphasize Talent Recognition

“Thousands of geniuses live and die undiscovered—either by themselves or by others.” Mark Twain

As indicated in passing earlier, it is easy to overlook the talents of at-risk students because of the immediate, in-your-face problems. With an extremely high-octane, ADHD youngster, for example, parents and teachers tend to focus on day-to-day survival. Since their reality centres on dealing with ongoing and seemingly endless problems in the here and now, they can almost be excused for having neither the time nor inclination to look for strengths. The point has already been made that behaviourally challenging, delinquent-type, and/or gang-involved youth are unlikely to have their gifts recognized, let alone nurtured.

Nonetheless, recognizing and developing talent ought to be a top priority for all educators (McCluskey & Treffinger, 1998; Treffinger, 1998). Young (1995) has even gone so far as to recommend that all teachers should search actively for indicators of special passions and abilities in their students by designing open-ended activities and assignments to permit potential to surface, keeping a notepad on hand to record interesting observations, and being on the lookout for talent over an extended period of time. In short, the idea is that all educators should view themselves as talent spotters or talent scouts who listen, observe, and gather and record information about the gifts of all students—including the ones with behavioural issues—in a variety of contexts (Seita, 2006; Young, 1995). We must all make a point of discovering strengths in challenging kids (Brendtro & Larson, 2006).

Foundational Models that Have Guided *Lost Prizes*

There are a number of models that highlight certain tonal and attitudinal features we feel ought to be in place when interacting with talented, at-risk youth. Before moving on to specific projects, then, it makes sense to spend a little time considering some of the theoretical frameworks that have influenced us most profoundly. The three models we have selected were each first developed as conceptual roadmaps or theoretical guides, but all of them soon also became the impetus and foundation for very concrete programming. Since all have been discussed in substantial detail elsewhere, remarks here will be brief and aimed at providing a basic overview of the conceptual underpinnings of our work.
The Circle of Courage

“Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her.” Urie Bronfenbrenner

The well-known Circle of Courage model was first proposed in 1990 by Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern. In our projects and this discussion, we have borrowed heavily from their pioneering work (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002; Van Bockern, Brendtro, & Brokenleg, 2003). In large part, the Circle of Courage was developed because of concerns that traditional childhood environments are being eroded and made toxic due to weak and inconsistent parenting, schools plagued by conflict and failure, disintegrating community support systems, and a new technologically rich but emotionally poor societal ethos (Elkind, 1981, 1984; Pipher, 1997; Putnam 2000). As a result, alienated, recalcitrant, and peer- and adult-wary children—children with “affect hunger” as it were (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1980)—become “discouraged through alienation” and act out by continuously biting the hands that did not feed them (Brendtro, Van Bockern, & Clementson, 1995). Left in many ways to their own devices, these unengaged young people often seek “artificial belongings” through gang membership, substance abuse, association with false friends, and connections with manipulative, exploitive adults. Relationship-resistant, affect-hungry young people of this type typically defy and challenge parents, teachers, and other caregivers, who—if untrained—may retaliate in kind with uncontrolled anger and counter-aggression (Long & Morse, 1996; Long, Wood, & Fecser, 2001).

Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002) have suggested that many children and youth today also become “discouraged through failure” in non-reclaiming schools, where fear of academic and social failure is used punitively as a control strategy (Kohn, 2006; Van Bockern, 1993); “discouraged through irresponsibility,” where lack of attachment and the sense that “nobody cares” leads to defiance (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1980); and “discouraged through selfishness,” where the “me” generation has somehow dismissed justice, caring, and a concern for others in favour of an empty, self-centred, hedonistic pursuit of status, power, and money (Benson, Williams, & Johnson, 1987; Hedin, 1989). Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern emphasized as well that our “wars” on crime and poverty have set the stage for adversarial, us-versus-them scenarios rather than for cooperative, collaborative problem solving. Along the same lines, they have indicated that biased, blaming d-word labelling of youth (e.g., deprived, deviant, disobedient, disordered, disrespectful, disruptive, and disturbed) causes deficit-based overfocusing on the negatives.

The Circle of Courage is a compensatory attempt to create a strength-based model of youth empowerment. Although the Native American traditions and philosophies of child rearing are front and centre, the framework is also grounded solidly in contemporary developmental psychology and research, and in the sensitive observations and insights of early youth workers. For Native American adults, the purpose of life was nurturing children (“sacred beings”). As shown in Figure 1, the
Circle of Courage—portrayed in medicine-wheel style by Lakota Sioux artist George Bluebird—identifies four universal needs of children in all cultures: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity.

### Figure 1
**The Circle of Courage**

![The Circle of Courage](image)

The Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). Used with permission from Reclaiming Youth International, [www.reclaiming.com](http://www.reclaiming.com).

**Belonging.** Children in every culture throughout the world need to belong, and depriving them of care is seen as universally wrong. In traditional Native American society, belonging was paramount, and all adults—not only the biological parents—were expected to watch out for and teach the children of the community. Thus, children were attached to and received care and nurturance from a large network of significant others.

Unlike traditional tribal cultures, it has been noted that contemporary society is threatened by a loss of “community” (Marty, 1987). And, as mentioned previously, there is no doubt that too many unattached children and youth are desperately seeking unhealthy, artificial belongings. The early youth work pioneers understood the power of human attachment: that love, not teaching, lay at the heart of education (Pestalozzi, 1951), that establishing human relationships is the essence of working with troubled youth (Aichorn, 1935), and that, in many ways, “Relationships . . . are the intervention” (Gharabaghi, 2008). One should consider the possibility that positive relationships in youth programs and schools are likely more important than any of the highfalutin, endlessly studied intervention strategies employed (Brophy, 1986).
Mastery. In Native American culture, people strove for personal attainment and satisfaction, not to belittle, demean, or feel superior to an opponent. Individual accomplishments were shared with others, so that success became the property of all rather than the exclusive possession of an elite few. As Standing Bear (1978) put it, Native children were taught to honour the achievements of others, and persons receiving recognition were expected to accept it without hubris. Skilled peers were viewed as models, not competitors.

Orlick (1982) pointed out that many school games (e.g., King of the Mountain) prevent all but one child from reaching the ultimate goal. And the win-at-all-costs mantra has overtaken amateur and professional sports with a vengeance. One example: the short-lived “You don’t win silver, you lose gold” slogan brought forward by one company at the Atlanta Olympic Games. The pressure of competition and fear of not meeting expectations can cause youngsters—and adults—to lie, cheat, and hurt others as they claw their way to “the top” in sports, academics, business, and other fields of human endeavour. In a call for balance, Montessori (1949) criticized the overemphasis on obedience and competition in schools, and advocated that more time be spent building upon the natural curiosity and desire to learn that are so much a part of normal childhood. And Goleman (1995) suggested that developing emotional skills can be as or more important to success in life than focusing on other abilities.

Independence. Self-determination and individual freedom were highly valued in Native American culture, quite likely because survival often depended upon making independent decisions. To foster a sense of responsibility, children were given the opportunity to make their own judgments without coercion. In contrast to the Western European “obedience” models of discipline, youngsters in the tribe were encouraged to act autonomously: They made decisions on the basis of self-determined goals rather than on demands imposed by others (Bryde, 1971). Elders played a role by modelling responsibility and teaching values, but they did not interfere or force compliance. Back in the 19th century, Haines (1888) observed that Native Americans treated their children with consideration and respect. The major method of discipline was kind lecturing. Blue Whirlwind (cf. Hassrick, 1964) reported that his people loved, spoke gently to, and never struck their children. And in 1933, Standing Bear (1978)—taking a perspective diametrically opposed to the European tradition of parenting and most current behaviour modification approaches—noted that adults in his tribe did not believe in offering children rewards or prizes for behaving or performing well. Achievement itself was the reward. Harsh punishment was viewed as unhealthy and, in its stead, discussion, modelling, group influence, and holding high expectations were the strategies of choice.

Kohn (2006) has argued that we can develop responsibility in children and youth by moving away from demanding compliance and toward emphasizing community. His view (consistent with Standing Bear’s) is that adults should eliminate rewards and punishment and, through meetings and discussions, give children voice and choice. Choosing, trying, and doing become the building blocks of independence.
There are many examples: waiting patiently for a toddler to climb unaided into a chair, allowing pre-schoolers to struggle to put on their coats, assigning Grade 1 students the task of running notes to the office, expecting youngsters to help care for their pets, and encouraging children to contribute and take responsibility for a variety of other chores.

Generosity. Training in altruism in Native American communities began in early childhood. Young boys envisioned the day when they could be part of the hunt, bring down their first game, and carry the meat home for people in need (Black Elk, 1932). When a mother shared food with others, she allowed her children to pass out portions so they too could experience the joy of giving (Standing Bear, 1978). A recurrent theme in Native American culture highlights the virtue of generosity, even if it means parting with one’s most treasured possessions. To illustrate, Eastman (1902) recalled being taught by his grandmother that he should unselfishly give away his puppy, his pride and joy, in order to become thoughtful and courageous. Unreserved gift giving was common, and it was considered abhorrent to accumulate property for personal pleasure (Hassrick, 1964). Individual ownership was encouraged not for conspicuous consumption, but to help others. To sum up, the core values of sharing and responsibility were deeply ingrained in Native communities, and things were considered much less important than people.

To foster the spirit of generosity and to counter the “Look out for Number 1” attitude so prevalent in contemporary society, Conrad and Hedin (1987) have recommended including more opportunities for student community service in the school curriculum. There is evidence that positive things happen when service learning programs, such as the ones alluded to earlier, are implemented and children and youth are allowed to help others. Indeed, in her literature review, Hedin (1989) pointed to several studies indicating that service-learning experiences stimulate intellectual growth and result in increased self-esteem, moral development, and responsibility.

From a Circle of Courage perspective, then, intervention becomes a matter of “mending broken circles.” Children and youth are complete only if they have an abundance of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity in their lives. At the time of colonization, Native American children were described as respectful, happy, and courageous by early European anthropologists. And certainly, the Native philosophy of child rearing presents an intriguing alternative to more modern psychological, behaviour-management, and zero-tolerance approaches. In the view of many current practitioners, including ourselves, the values embodied in the Circle of Courage can and should be applied directly to working with troubled youth today.

In nurturing environments, the child’s needs are fortified in interwoven fashion; one is not neglected for another. When the Circle of Courage is broken, however, needs in at least one dimension are not met, which throws the lives of young people out of balance. Such imbalance causes discouragement and other assorted troubles. It is possible to reclaim harmony by re-establishing the core values, and—using
Hemingway’s phrase—to help people become stronger in broken places. For badly damaged, at-risk youth, though, the journey of reclamation can be a long and arduous one.

A final comment. I have occasionally heard educators remark that the Circle of Courage lacks scientific rigour (“fluffy” was the term used by one). If those detractors took the time to review the literature carefully, however, they might be surprised. The approach truly is grounded in contemporary research and best practice, and all sorts of intervention programs, curricular material, and evaluative studies around the world have been based on this framework. It is quite remarkable the way in which the traditional Aboriginal worldview and wisdom parallel and intersect with the direction of Western science. In fact, a large body of contemporary research strongly validates the Circle of Courage. In closing this segment, I will follow the lead of Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002) and refer doubters to the extensive developmental and social psychological literature on the four As: attachment (belonging), achievement (mastery), autonomy (independence), and altruism (generosity).

The Prism Metaphor for Reversing Underachievement

"Let us suppose that there are two sorts of existences—one seen, the other unseen." Socrates

Reversing underachievement in talented students has not proven to be an easy task, perhaps because the most widely used programs focus on negative behaviour and take a “we’ll-cure-what-ails-you” or a “work-hard-and-you-will-be-rewarded” approach. Such philosophies imply that underachievers are motivated to improve and are willing and able to become self-disciplined in order to change their pattern of behaviour.

According to Kaufman (1991), however, this is usually not the case. Like Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern, she defined these learners as discouraged and argued that they need encouragement, not discipline, organizational tips, or more time on task to overcome their lethargy and failure. The more successful programs for underachievers tend to be child-centred, to focus on strengths, and to build upon student interests (Baum, 1988; Brendtro & Shahbazian, 2004; McCluskey, Baker, & McCluskey, 2005; Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Tannenbaum & Baldwin, 1983; Treffinger, Young, Nassab, & Wittig, 2004; Whitmore, 1980). They also allow room for self-selection, and engage and actively involve the students in doing meaningful work that they are passionate about.

In his seminal publication on the Enrichment Triad Model, Renzulli—a leading scholar in gifted education for a long time now—set out to transform high-ability students from lesson learners or consumers of facts to producers of new knowledge (Renzulli, 1977; Renzulli & Reis, 1997). The model laid out three categories of experience: Type I enrichment consists of general exploratory activities to expose students to new, exciting material not covered in the basic curriculum; Type II
enrichment involves group training activities to develop special skills and processes; and Type III enrichment features higher-order challenges. More specifically, at the Type III level, children become actual investigators of real-world problems and target their work for real-life audiences. They produce creative products through the collection of raw data, the use of advanced problem-solving techniques, and the application of research strategies or artistic innovations that are employed by frontline people in various fields.

Baum, Renzulli, and Hébert (1995) built upon this foundation to propose another highly original way to view and motivate reluctant children and youth. Specifically, their Prism Metaphor—presented schematically in Figure 2—highlights the potential impact enrichment can have on underachievement. According to this visual metaphor, underachieving students are overwhelmed by learning and emotional problems, social/behavioural issues, and inappropriate curriculum. They are not moving forward, likely because interventions to date have used the wrong lens (i.e., traditional teacher-directed approaches) to focus the problem. However, once relevant Type III enrichment activities—involving mentoring, real-world problem solving, and self-selected topics—are put in place, things change for the better. Indeed, just as a prism somehow converts nondescript white light into a magical array of colours, so can Type III enrichment inspire and lead underperforming gifted students toward positive outcomes and productivity. Although somewhat speculative, the optimistic undercurrent of this framework is uplifting.

The Prism Metaphor for Reversing Underachievement (Baum, Renzulli, and Hébert, 1995). Used with permission of the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.
Renzulli and his team went on to demonstrate the value of the Prism Metaphor in a tangible fashion by exploring the possibility of using Type III enrichment activities to reverse underachievement in talented children (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995). In their study, 12 teachers—all trained in the Enrichment Triad approach—selected 17 identified gifted students who were performing below potential in school. The children, 5 girls and 12 boys, ranged in age from 8 to 13. Each was guided through a Type III experience by the referring teacher, who took on the role of researcher. Rather than assume control of the learning process, the teachers became facilitators—helping students to focus problems, to secure necessary materials, to review and revise their work, and to overcome obstacles within the context of pursuing a topic that had great personal meaning. The teachers also assumed the roles of mentor and confidant to the students and, as such, discovered much about the personal lives, frustrations, interests, and dreams of their young charges. In their extended role as educators-researchers, the teachers also acted as participant observers, recording their observations systematically, reflecting upon their entries, and documenting effective strategies.

For the most part, the investigation was carried out over the course of one academic year. It proceeded through four phases. Phase I involved identifying underachieving students with high academic potential through scores on ability and achievement tests, grades, classroom records, work samples, and anecdotal information gathered from teachers and permanent records. In Phase II, further information about the students’ lives and preferences was obtained through the use of interest surveys, personal essays about school, and informal interviews. During Phase III, teachers worked closely with students on their Type III investigations. The steps included focusing the problem to be examined, setting up a management plan, providing necessary resources and strategies, and helping students share the completed investigation with interested audiences. In Phase IV, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the teachers to get some sense of their feelings about the intervention, the overall experience, and the effect on the students.

A complete discussion of the data collection, analysis, and results is offered in the original report (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995). To summarize parsimoniously, positive gains were made by almost all of the students through their involvement in the Type III interventions. A variety of ambitious projects were undertaken, including designing a prototype environment for birds for a NASA experiment, building a rocket for actual launch, teaching a computer class, doing set designs for drama club, conducting a comparative study of brain functioning in humans and rats, creating a series of relief and topographic maps, designing and constructing a school planetarium, writing a “choose your own adventure” book, developing a prototype for a solar car, drawing a cartoon strip for publication, and starting a successful campaign to change the school lunch/milk policy. In most cases, during the course of the year or in the year following the intervention, there was marked improvement in student achievement, attitude, or behaviour. The teachers identified several strategies that promoted success: knowing the students, focusing on the children’s positive qualities, accepting their own roles as facilitators, understanding
the Type III process, applying their role as researchers, and believing in the students’ abilities.

**The Amphitheater Model**

“The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach.” *Paulo Freire*

The Amphitheater Model for Talent Development encapsulates some of the work done in gifted education by members of our own team (McCluskey, Treffinger, & Baker, 2002, 2010). Shown in Figure 3, it represents a synthesis of the initial McCluskey-Walker Integrated Enrichment Model (1986), the Levels of Service (LoS) approach to programming (Treffinger, Young, Nassab, & Wittig, 2004), and the six “indicators of excellence” that are often used to guide enrichment planning, namely individualized basics, effective acceleration, appropriate enrichment, independence and self-direction, personal and social growth, and careers and future outlook (Treffinger, Sortore, & McCluskey, 1995). The Amphitheater outcome-based model fits well with the philosophy and directions outlined in various differentiated instruction documents, in that it permits inclusion, recognizes diversity and a broad range of talents, and focuses directly on teaching and learning.

![The Amphitheater Model for Talent Development](image-url)

*The Amphitheater Model for Talent Development (McCluskey, Treffinger, & Baker, 2002). Used with permission of the Center for Creative Learning.*
The circle in the centre of the figure depicts the central goal of programming: to create classrooms where all learners can discover and develop their strengths and talents as fully as possible. The foundations represent five areas of primary importance in learning and teaching: (1) clarity of valued outcomes (identifying what outcomes of schooling are most important and accepted by staff, students, and community as worth knowing) and authentic assessment of those outcomes; (2) alternative learning environments, in which instruction is managed in flexible ways to help meet the needs of all students; (3) metacognitive or “learning to learn” skills, in which students gain the ability to monitor their own thinking and behaviour effectively and to make decisions about learning; (4) diversity and individuality, through which we recognize and respond appropriately to the unique characteristics and learning styles of all students; and (5) productive thinking, in which we help students to think creatively and critically, to solve problems, and to make decisions.

Five important strands or “threads” also run through the model: (1) competence and challenge—helping students to acquire and use a rich knowledge and information base, to set challenging expectations for themselves, and to learn and apply the personal and group strategies required for mastery and productivity; (2) communication skills—helping students to express their ideas, questions, interests, and concerns in many forms and using a variety of media; (3) engagement and exploration—offering learning opportunities in which students have personal investment or ownership in the goals, the processes, and the outcomes, and nurturing curiosity, risk taking, and exploration as sources of intrinsic motivation; (4) collaboration and leadership—helping students to function effectively as part of a group, and to develop and share their personal strengths; and (5) using technology for learning and doing—helping students to learn more efficiently by applying many kinds of instructional technology in their work, projects, and lives in general.

If truth be told, the Amphitheater Model has been criticized by some for being “too complex.” We remain unapologetic: The concepts and strategies involved are complicated, and we have no desire to dummy down the process. Some years ago, the University of Winnipeg introduced an undergraduate course, Enrichment and Talent Development, designed to expose students to current philosophy and models in gifted education, and to help them create classroom environments that maximize the talents of all learners. Borrowing from the work of many of the previously mentioned researchers, this course emphasizes practical strategies such as curriculum compacting, mentoring, creative problem solving, self-directed learning, and the development of theme units. Since it highlights the complexities of the area and serves as a cognitive map for students, instructors have found the Amphitheater Model to be useful as an “organizer” and foundation for the course. It has also been employed as a programmatic guide in projects to develop the talents of at-risk students in Canada, the U.S., and Australia, largely—we are told—because of its pragmatic emphasis on flexible facilitation, self-directed learning, and equity.
A Blending of Two Perspectives

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.” John Muir

Perhaps the “essence” of the original Lost Prizes project—and the feature that made it such a widely cited program in the gifted/talented and the at-risk children and youth literature—is that it did, in fact, bring together and blend theory and programmatic approaches from both the enrichment and at-risk domains (McCluskey, in press, a).

The Enrichment Components

“Genius without Education is like Silver in the Mine.” Benjamin Franklin

From the beginning, the foundation blocks of Lost Prizes were the Creative Problem Solving and the mentoring pieces. It will become clear a bit later how Feldhusen’s (1995) Talent Identification and Development in Education (TIDE) framework also figured into the early projects. At different times in different undertakings, we and our colleagues also incorporated segments of the Levels of Service (LoS) approach (Treffinger, Young, Nassab, & Wittig, 2004), the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) (Renzulli & Reis, 1997), the sourcebook for gifted education published by Manitoba Education (Baker, McCluskey, Large, Gemmell, Sadowy, Wood, & Bevis, 1989), and, of course, the then-evolving Amphitheater Model (McCluskey, Treffinger, & Baker, 2002, 2010). Recently, acknowledging the need to inject some new technology into the mix, we have added the Renzulli Learning System as well (found at <www.renzullilearning.com>). We will discuss a few of these in more detail.

Creative Problem Solving (CPS)

The actual Creative Problem Solving training involves examining theory and research, debunking myths that inhibit creative thinking, differentiating between creative and critical thinking (and their application), and identifying and understanding various problem-solving styles. Participants learn about the CPS model, the specific components and stages of the process, and how to build and apply a personal “tool box” of practical strategies. Quite quickly, the focus moves from theory to real-life issues, generating more and better ideas, and translating good ideas into action plans.

Between them, the two classic texts on the topic—one at the introductory level (Treffinger, Isaksen, & Stead-Dorval, 2006) and the other for more in-depth study (Isaksen, Dorval, & Treffinger, 2011)—cover a vast amount of information about CPS, from its philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, to its well-established research base, to its process and tools.
At the time of the first *Lost Prizes* project, our group used the first edition of *Creative Problem Solving: An Introduction* with the students (Treffinger & Isaksen, 1992). Following the Creative Learning Model therein, our approach was to teach CPS strategies in singularly direct fashion. The aim, naturally, was to help those who dropped out of school to develop their problem-solving abilities and then, gradually, to apply these tools to their own life situations. Initially, thinking it would be the simplest and most efficient teaching guide, we stuck closely to the linear model presented in Figure 4.

The approach worked relatively well, but we weren’t entirely satisfied. Treffinger, Isaksen, and Dorval—along with participants in our first group—began to assert that life is not merely a “marble drop,” where problems are magically solved by applying easy-to-follow, step-by-step formulae. As a result, just as updated versions of computer software appear on a regular basis, so too has CPS evolved and changed over the years. An important development occurred when the framework was reconfigured into a more circular format, shown in Figure 5. Incidentally, this representation connected well with the Aboriginal emphasis on circular worldviews and sharing circles, and with models such as the Circle of Courage.

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**Figure 4**

**Linear View of CPS Components and Stages**

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Linear View of CPS Components and Stages (Treffinger & Isaksen, 1992). Used with permission of the Center for Creative Learning, Inc., and the Creative Problem Solving Group, Inc.
Since Creative Problem Solving truly is a fluid model, there have been ongoing changes right up until the present (Treffinger, Isaksen, & Dorval, 1992, 1994, 2000). The latest, most up-to-date CPS Version 6.1 is offered in Figure 6.
Mentoring

Because it is a relatively low cost method for building relationships and supporting facilitator-guided work, mentoring has long been used in gifted education to enrich the experiences of high-ability students. Torrance (1984, p. 2) postulated, “A mentor is a creatively productive person who teaches, counsels, and inspires a student with similar interests. The relationship is characterized by mutual caring, depth, and response.” This refreshing definition has many interesting components: It emphasizes the relationship, the high expectations of the commitment, and the two-way nature of the connection. Our view that a mentor ought to become a “talent spotter” fits nicely into this conceptualization (Mccluskey & Treffinger, 1998). Daloz (1986) stated that a mentor should be a guide, rather than a tour director, who offers support through advocacy, listening, sharing, establishing structure, emphasizing strengths, and making the experience positive. A popular anonymous quote sums it up well: “A mentor is a person whose hindsight can become your foresight.”

Like so many other terms, the word mentoring has come down to us from ancient Greek literature (Nash & Treffinger, 1993; Noller & Frey, 1995). It originated in Homer’s epic poem, The Odyssey, wherein Odysseus (Ulysses)—setting off for the Trojan wars—left his son Telemachus in the care of his trusted friend Mentor. To complicate matters in true Homeric style, Mentor eventually turned out to be the goddess Athena in disguise. Boston (1976), linking his argument to mythology, proposed that ideal mentoring should involve three crucial elements: (1) servicing other roles while entering into the relationship (Mentor did not allow himself to
be simply a full-time babysitter); (2) becoming a conduit for the wisdom of others (Mentor, as the proverbial “guide on the side,” provided direction for Telemachus by channelling information to him from many other sources); and (3) building a long-term connection (Mentor continued to provide support as the boy grew to adulthood). It is worthwhile keeping these components in mind when developing a mentoring program.

There are other lessons to be learned from the foregoing attempts at definition: Emphasize the quality of the relationship, expect creative productivity, and match mentors and “mentees” extremely carefully. Of course, informal, “spontaneous” mentoring often happens naturally (Noller & Frey, 1994)—unplanned connections can uncover and nurture talent in troubled individuals (cf. Brown, 1983; Seita, Mitchell, & Tobin, 1996). In other situations, relationships are definitely planned and systematic. Such “instrumental” mentoring tends, not unexpectedly, to be much more far-reaching than chance encounters (Noller & Frey, 1994). Several useful how-to manuals focusing on mentoring topics such as models, procedures, selection (of mentors and mentees), training, contracts, and evaluation have been developed to assist with designing and carrying out formal mentoring programs (e.g., De Rosenroll, Saunders, & Carr, 1993; Haeger & Feldhusen, 1989; Nash & Treffinger, 1993). In short, mentoring in various forms has long been an integral part of many enrichment initiatives and, in our evolving times, e-mentoring is also emerging as a mechanism for supporting gifted students (Yamin, 2011).

**Renzulli Learning System**

One of the most comprehensive enrichment options for high-ability young people is the Renzulli Learning System. A totally web-based tool developed at the University of Connecticut, this program informs participants about Renzulli’s comprehensive work in gifted education, helps identify interest areas of the students, teaches how to use the Internet effectively, and offers a huge variety of guided research projects for young people of different ages with assorted interests. An annual site licence is required, which allows all teachers, students, and their parents to participate in the process, explore their interests, and undertake structured, engaging enrichment activities at various grade levels (www.renzullilearning.com).
The At-Risk Components

“More important than the curriculum is the question of the methods of teaching and the spirit in which the teaching is given.” Bertrand Russell

The Circle of Courage and other conceptualizations have had a significant influence on Lost Prizes. However, models alone are not enough for practitioners on the front lines. Without hands-on skills, uncertain and unprepared educators will be “eaten alive.” In an effort to ensure proper preparation, then, we encourage our facilitators to take some very specific, non-traditional training programs to ready themselves for the challenge of working with talented, at-risk youth. Here are three of the most valuable.

Response Ability Pathways (RAP)

This program provides foundation training for creating environments that foster positive development. All children and youth deserve sensitive teachers who have the ability to respond to needs instead of merely reacting to problems and recalcitrant or disruptive behaviour. RAP gives educators a roadmap for encouraging vulnerable young people to take responsibility for self and others. Based on the Circle of Courage framework, resilience literature, and neurological research, this technique develops abilities to connect with relationship-resistant students, clarifies problems, and promotes harmony in a climate of mutual respect (Brendtro & du Toit, 2005).

Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI)

Teachers and other caregivers need some pragmatic strategies to cope and problem solve more effectively with marginalized children and youth. LSCI is a strength-based approach that has proven to be highly effective with troubled, troubling young people. Some of the interventions involved are (1) reframing problems as opportunities (shifting from reactive “crisis management” to proactive “crisis teaching”), (2) revisiting the conflict cycle (understanding the triggers, phases of aggression, and methods for de-escalating counter-aggression), (3) decoding the underlying meaning of behaviour, and (4) recovering after an emotionally charged episode (Long, Wood, & Fecser, 2001).

Developmental Audit

Grounded in the resilience literature, principles of neuroscience, and ecological research on child development, the Developmental Audit “triangulates real-world information from multiple data sources” to bring the actions of at-risk children and youth into focus. It offers a breath-of-fresh-air alternative to standard deficit-based assessment, and provides an understanding of how a particular child or adolescent arrived at this point in his or her life. The young person is a full participant in the process and, essentially, a primary data source. The completed Audit helps decode
present behaviour, and points the way toward positive planning, learning, and growth (Brendtro & Shahbazian, 2004; Freado, 2011).

**Made-in-Manitoba Programs**

“One must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star.”

*Friedrich Nietzsche*

The literature, along with all our experience in the schools, convinced us that there is an abundance of untapped potential out there, and far too many talented young people who run afoul of the powers-that-be, underperform, and/or drop out. Due to societal obstacles, life pressures, and lack of opportunity, it appears many “diamonds” are destined to remain “in the rough” unless we can begin to intervene in a productive way. The *Lost Prizes* and related projects represented a chance to try to do something about the lamentable waste of talent capital—to begin polishing rather than discarding our bad apples.

**Lost Prizes**

From September 1993 to June 1996, the three Manitoba school divisions mentioned earlier ran the joint *Lost Prizes* venture to “recapture” at-risk, high-ability school dropouts. As indicated at the outset of this monograph, despite their undeniable talent, the targeted individuals had withdrawn or been pushed from the system. Many (actually most) had issues with drugs and alcohol, and several had spent time in the Manitoba Youth Centre. The intent of the project team was to reach out to these troubled youth, somehow form relationships, and encourage thoughtful and productive action on their part.

The methodology and outcomes of the inaugural *Lost Prizes* project have been well documented (McCluskey, 2011; McCluskey, Baker, Bergsgaard, & McCluskey, 2001, 2003; McCluskey, Baker, & McCluskey, 2005; McCluskey, Baker, O’Hagan, & Treffinger, 1995, 1998). Featuring CPS, mentoring, and other programming, and supported by a grant from Manitoba Education, the initiative was sustained for three years. During that period, 88 students participated. Each year, using Feldhusen’s (1995) Talent Identification and Development in Education (TIDE) model, educators in the three jurisdictions identified dropouts who had displayed talent in the domains shown in Figure 7.

The project took place separately, for two months per year, in each of the divisions. From the outset, the majority of students let it be known that they were decidedly reluctant to return to their high schools—too many unpalatable things had happened to them there. Therefore, during the month-long first (in-class) phase of the program, our facilitator—along with many invited resource people—delivered information sessions, career exploration curriculum, and CPS training in rented premises away from the schools. Before presenting the “official” Creative Problem
Solving material, however, a good chunk of time was devoted to preparing and setting the stage for problem solving (McCluskey, 2000b).

As the in-class phase progressed, we used the CPS strategy outlined in Figure 8 to stress the need for the re-engaged young men and women to consider how to move from their “current reality” to a “desired future state” (Treffinger, Isaksen, & Dorval, 1994). Immediately afterward, Individual Growth Plans were mapped out to help each “prize” identify and work toward goals (Feldhusen, 1995). Other CPS tools, including ALoU (examining the “Advantages” of an idea, its “Limitations,” ways to “overcome” potential pitfalls, and “Unique” possibilities) and identifying probable “Assisters” and “Resisters” (people or factors that will either help or impede the quest toward productive outcomes), also became a central part of the process. Gradually, the emphasis shifted to real-life problems, generating more and better alternatives, and moving good ideas into action plans. Throughout the in-class segment, there was plenty of opportunity to practise and develop the skills involved. Students completing this part of the program earned one high-school credit.
A word of caution. With our first group, we made the mistake of preparing only one Growth Plan per participant. As a result, there ended up being several disappointed students who did not achieve instant success on their chosen path. Learning from experience not to put all our eggs in one basket, in all subsequent groups we urged the participants to develop multiple plans. Each learned to ask: If my first plan doesn’t work, what might I try next? And after that . . . ? Single plans usually did not do the trick, but having two or three fallback positions worked well.

Phase two of the program, a one-month job placement that matched student interests to the employment site, allowed the young men and women to gain real-world experience. Quite clearly, they benefited from the opportunity to confront and resolve issues and problems with the help of caring mentors in the business community. Using prescribed guidelines, these workplace hosts—along with the facilitator—monitored performance. Students faring satisfactorily in the job setting received a second credit.

Entrepreneurs in the respective regions were eager to provide training grounds for the refocusing youth. In truth, the business partners were not expected to offer a traditional work placement as such, but rather to serve as “philanthropic mentors” to guide and support the students in a concrete way. Most, working cooperatively with the school systems, bonded with, went that extra mile for, and virtually “adopted” their students. By the way, one ingredient that helped establish a firm foundation for Lost Prizes was the in-depth training put in place for many of the business partners and educators. During this and related programs, several of the “names” in the fields of Creative Problem Solving, talent development, and mentoring (i.e., Dorval,
Feldhusen, Isaksen, Noller, Renzulli, and Treffinger) visited Manitoba to conduct intensive workshop sessions. Before they met with students, our workplace hosts had received training from Noller on how to mentor effectively, and a compressed two-day CPS course from Isaksen (so they could relate to what the young people were attempting to accomplish).

**Lost Prizes: Outcomes, Observations, and Evaluation**

Not every one of the participants blossomed: They were, after all, chosen from a seriously at-risk population. A total of 21 youth, uninterested or overwhelmed by troubles of one kind or another (e.g., run-ins with the law, family breakups, pregnancy, illness, and so on), withdrew without completing even the first credit. And 10 others (who had earned at least one credit) moved away and were impossible to track. Nonetheless, as a result of Lost Prizes, many formerly disenchanted, disillusioned, and disconnected dropouts did respond by “getting their acts together” in dramatic fashion once their talents were identified, appreciated, and nurtured. A 1998 status review of successful participants—summarized in Table 1—showed that 24 entered the workforce and obtained permanent, full-time employment (4 of these graduated, and 2 were self-employed), 18 returned to school and were performing solidly, 9 had just graduated from high school, and 6 more went on to university or community college after completing Grade 12. Of the 88 at-risk dropouts who were enrolled in Lost Prizes, then, 57 (or 64.77%) ended up returning to high school, entering post-secondary programs, or securing employment (McCluskey, Baker, O’Hagan, & Treffinger, 1998).

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<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned to and performing well in high school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just graduated from high school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated &amp; attending college or university</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrew</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
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However, frequency counts as such do not always tell the full story. For example, years after the fact, we encountered students who had withdrawn from the program and disappeared from view. Some were eager to tell us that, despite the apparent failure, Lost Prizes was the start of their life turnaround.
We could not help but notice something else as well: It was surprising for us to observe—despite their school setbacks—how many of the students had truly incredible artistic, literary, and musical talents. The importance of the arts in bringing out the gifts of marginalized youth is well recognized (Block, Harris, & Laing, 2005; Hager, 2003; Kanevsky, Corke, & Frangkiser, 2008; Morin, 2003), so we strove to pick up on the strengths and fit liberal doses of music, art, and drama into the program.

At this point, we will allow some of the participants to speak for themselves. In their exit comments, almost all of them emphasized the impact of the CPS training and mentoring. They shared other thoughts as well (Olenick, Turhoch, Pawlyshyn, Arnott, & Gauthier, 1995). First, here is Darren Olenick:

Regular high school and I didn’t get along very well, especially after midway through grade 11. . . . In our less than ideal system, classes as a whole are viewed as mundane, arduous trials that you have to go through in order to graduate, make something of yourself, and become a productive member of the work force. This sort of thing might be fine for some of the left-brained, linear-thinking students, but for those with a more creative bent, it is merely oppressive. Love of learning, stimulating instruction, and motivating content is an ideal combination—a combination I found in Lost Prizes. . . .

Because someone had taken an interest and allowed us to be heard, there was a marked attitude shift on our part. . . . Many students who prefer linear, step-by-step, directed, cookbook learning wouldn’t like the approach—we did. . . .

In the past, most teachers were “the enemy” . . . I now understand that I too have to do my part; there is some onus on me to begin taking ownership for my own learning. And I intend to respond by taking on more and more! . . .

I have started a musical group (called Lost Prizes, of course) with a few of the other students—our main goal is to create fanciful songs with ostentatiously pedantic lyrics. (p. 175–178)

Darren and his friends accomplished this goal, first learning to play instruments (most members of the band had absolutely no prior musical training), then writing their own music and lyrics, and finally giving a number of successful concerts in the school divisions, at the University of Winnipeg, and at a conference held that year in Tampa, Florida (more about that experience momentarily).

Another participant, Kris Pawlyshyn, had this to say:

I had many problems as I was entering my teen years. Perhaps because of that, I wasn’t interested in school. From the beginning, I felt there was very little challenge. I got off to a bad start, had few friends, and behaved very badly myself. As a result I got a bad reputation. . . . Anyway, things just didn’t click, so I ended up dropping out.
I finally got a break when *Lost Prizes* came along. I was uncertain and skeptical about the program at first, but gradually I came to appreciate and respond to the opportunity. . . . Most important for me was the fact that somebody recognized that I might have a talent (albeit in the embryo stage), and they gave me the encouragement and tender loving care I needed to nurture it. (p. 180–181)

During the in-class phase, Kris (who, by the way, went on to complete post-secondary studies and become a nurse), identified poetry as a major interest. Her style tended to be dark—she had some anger to work through—and a trifle heavy-handed. (In her words, “Using a slap when a tap would do.”) Still, her offerings were intriguing. Here are a few verses drawn from her poem about the program.

*The Lost Prize*

A man with lazy eyes
blistered black and red
quoth, ‘We are perfect fools
with painted lives,
many are lost, ’n some are dead.’

Laughter raped my tongue,
a madman’s thoughts I spoke,
‘On a bat’s back I fly—
on hell’s grave I lie—
on swollen breast I cry—
I can do anything if I try.’

A hellish mist beneath me,
a single breath, denied.
Convincing death was easy,
straight to hell, I lied.

Drifting off—forever sleep,
unfettered by first sin.
Hell’s crypt turned sage (hush),
tired character, ready to begin.

Alas, strange rouge curtains,
hung like blood before my eyes.
Darkness housed an empty theatre
Somewhere—someone cried.

‘The show must go on,
we can still pretend.
Is this a beginning?
Is this an end?
Can anybody hear me?’
Then a man with wrinkled eyes,
a watchman in his stead,
quoth, ‘We are perfect fools
with painted lives,
many are lost, ‘n some are bred.’ (p. 181–184)

Kris, like so many of the other students, exhibited artistic and musical talent (yes, she was a member of the band). One of her drawings follows in Figure 9.

![Art by Kris Pawlyshyn](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Art by Kris Pawlyshyn. Used with permission.

Perhaps the highlight of the project occurred in November 1995, when seven of the “prizes” with very visible talents were invited to speak at the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Conference in Tampa. Imagine the excitement of young people, most of whom had never left the province, on the plane to Florida. Imagine the trepidation of the adult supervisors, travelling with and responsible for several known drug users (and dealers) with checkered pasts—some needed special dispensation to cross the border. Happily, the former problem students—determined to make the most of the opportunity—all behaved extremely well. During the session at the conference, each spoke briefly about troubled lives and suddenly promising futures. The poets recited, the photographer showed slides of his work, and the artists displayed their wares. And the band, formed just a couple of months before the big event, belted out original and powerful songs. The novice presenters
took the proceedings seriously, rehearsed speeches and songs for hours, and bonded into a tightly knit group. It was work, but great fun as well. Now, more than 16 years later, the *Lost Prizes* travellers are all still close and supportive of one another.

Ryan Gauthier, another one of the students, made a comment during the adventure that put everything into perspective. This talented young man had come a long way, moving from incarcerated delinquent (doing time regularly for drug possession, robbery, break and entry, and assault) to aspiring artist. Ryan’s intriguing story has been chronicled in the article, *From Down-and-Out to Up-and-Coming* (Gauthier, 1999). After the NAGC session, members of the audience began offering rather exorbitant amounts (in U.S. dollars—gold then to Canadians) for his sketches and paintings. Swamped by positive attention, compliments, and hard cash, Ryan—in the midst of signing copies of the newly released *Lost Prizes* book (which featured his art on the cover)—exclaimed excitedly: “This is a bigger high than drugs.” That sentiment summed up the program succinctly.

Ryan’s cover art and another sketch, included in Figures 10 and 11, reflect his Métis heritage. When he presented us with these drawings, we showed uncanny perspicacity by concluding he had talent.

**Figure 10**  
**Cover Art by Ryan Gauthier**

Cover Art by Ryan Gauthier. Used with permission.
Unengaged individuals tend to get “stuck” in maladaptive response patterns: They fight, or flee, or fool, or freeze, or withdraw, or steal, or whatever (Seita & Brendtro, 2005). In watching the Lost Prizes process unfold, it seemed to us that the CPS ingredients embedded in the programming provided a mechanism to help unstick the participants, as it were. Once they mastered some additional problem-solving strategies and acquired a new “toolbox” of skills, students were positioned to take advantage of the supportive mentoring experience and to make more reasoned educational, career, and personal decisions than in the past. Applying their expanded problem-solving abilities to their own life situations seemed to make a tremendous difference.

Years after Lost Prizes had come to an end, some of our team members were looking through the intake information and earlier school records. We noticed an interesting trend: Well over half of the participants had, at one time or another in their academic careers, been referred for ADHD or a learning disability.

One last observation. As Lost Prizes evolved over its three-year run, there was a gradual shift in our approach at intake. Initially, talent was the major criterion for acceptance into the program. That is, we were specifically seeking at-risk youth who had shown exceptional abilities in some area. With time, however, there was a broadening of selection criteria, such that the focus shifted somewhat toward
recognizing and harnessing the interests and abilities of a wider range of at-risk students. This expanded vision of talent identification and development eventually became the norm for all subsequent projects.

**Northern Lights**

After the final year of *Lost Prizes*, our team members in the three school divisions were asked to turn their attention to the plight of Aboriginal students in their jurisdictions. We did, and ended up rolling seamlessly into the *Northern Lights* initiative, which ran for another three years from September 1996 through June 1999.

At the time, there was widespread concern in Manitoba that one particular segment of our population was, in many ways, being marginalized. Disturbing facts abounded: half of Aboriginal young people lived in poverty; the death rate of Aboriginal infants and children was four times higher than the provincial average; the suicide rate among Aboriginal teens was six times higher; almost three quarters of youth housed in correctional facilities were Aboriginal; and alcoholism and violence surfaced in 80% of the families in some Aboriginal communities. As the agency that gathered this information concluded, Aboriginal children and youth in our province were clearly at greater risk than non-Aboriginals for “not becoming healthy, competent, productive, and happy adults” (Children and Youth Secretariat, 1997, p. 23). Not unexpectedly, there were educational consequences. After reviewing 1996 data from the Census Division for the city of Winnipeg, it was noted that 50.3% of Aboriginal youth dropped out of school, compared to 19.5% for non-Aboriginals (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 1999).

Incidentally, although most Canadians looked forward to the start of the new millennium with optimism, a Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (2000) document suggested that many young Aboriginal people in our province had precious little to celebrate at the turn of our newest century. In that report, it was noted that 34% of Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg were living in single parent families, and they were far more likely to become single parents themselves than non-Aboriginals. At 10.7%, our capital had one of the highest rates of Aboriginal single parents—one in five Aboriginal female youth were single mothers. As well, Manitoba had by far and away the lowest rate of school attendance among Aboriginal youth of any province or territory—only 44.1% were attending school in our province, compared to the national Aboriginal average of 50.4%. And Aboriginal young people here were only 74% as likely to be attending school as non-Aboriginals. Crime remained an issue, with large numbers of Aboriginals aged 15 to 29 joining gangs (particularly the Indian Posse and Manitoba Warriors). Aboriginals aged 12 to 17 represented over 70% of admissions to youth correctional facilities, and they were 12.4 times more likely to end up there than non-Aboriginals. Older Aboriginal youth aged 20 to 24 were 11 times more likely to be incarcerated in a provincial adult correctional facility. And of the girls in gangs, the great majority were Aboriginal (Nimmo, 2001).
More current reports show that the situation for Aboriginal children and youth has remained consistently desperate year after year (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 1999, 2010, 2011). In terms of criminal activity in Winnipeg, Aboriginal street gangs continue to dominate (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2006). At present, Manitoba is the child poverty capital of Canada, and its poverty rate for Aboriginal youngsters under 7 years of age is more than three times higher than that for non-Aboriginal children. A recent First Nations Information Governance Centre document on conditions in Manitoba revealed that more than one in three Aboriginal children in the province live in low-income families (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2010, 2011). And in a health survey undertaken by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 49% of the respondents from First Nations communities reported that “the food we bought just didn’t last and we didn’t have money to get more,” while 45% indicated that they “had to rely on only a few kinds of low cost food to feed my child/children because we were running out of money” (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2011, p. 29–30).

Prior to the *Northern Lights* project, researchers in the U.S. asserted that the abundant talent of Native American students was being left largely untapped. In their comprehensive report, for example, Callahan & McIntire (1994, p. v) indicated that, more often than not, Native students were given little opportunity to hone emerging skills. In fact, their potential often went entirely unnoticed: “Even as musical ability is not developed and recognized without the opportunity to experience music, distinguished cognitive ability will not develop and materialize without the opportunity to engage in challenging intellectual activities.” To further bring home the point, while participation in gifted/talented programs averaged 8.8% nationally in American schools back then, Native involvement was only 2.1% (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Again, things have not improved, for more recent literature has also indicated that a disproportionate number of gifted Native American students leave school early (Renzulli & Park, 2000). Similar neglect of talented Aboriginal children and youth has also been reported in our country (Bowd, 2003; McCluskey & Torrance, 2003). The high dropout rate of this segment of the Canadian population is especially disconcerting (Richards, 2011).

Although they had struggled to address the issue, educators in the tri-divisional *Lost Prizes* zone—like those in most regions of the country—had not been especially successful in meeting the needs and unlocking the talent of Aboriginal students. To illustrate, in one of the partnering divisions, a 1996 longitudinal review of the academic histories of 23 Aboriginal youngsters who had entered in Kindergarten revealed that only one graduated from high school. In another, only one of 25 Aboriginal students who left their communities to attend high school made it all the way through the system.

Thinking that perhaps an overemphasis on “problems” had caused us to miss out on some strengths and opportunities, Lord Selkirk, Interlake, and Agassiz school divisions followed up on *Lost Prizes* by putting in place a similar proactive program aimed directly at underachieving Aboriginal students. *Northern Lights*
got off to rather a shaky beginning, but eventually it too made a real difference. In other articles, the project has been described both in general terms (McCluskey, McCluskey, Baker, & O’Hagan, 1997) and in considerable detail (McCluskey, O’Hagan, Baker, & Richard, 2000).

Since it did not appear to be “broke,” we at first saw no need to adjust our format. Supported once more through funding from the provincial government, Northern Lights started out being almost identical to Lost Prizes. The Aboriginal participants, despite exhibiting specific talents, had left or were about to be removed from school for attendance, behavioural, or academic reasons. Of the 58 young people selected over the three-year period, 34 (58.62%) were Métis, while the remaining 24 (41.38%) were of First Nations descent. In each division, training and support were once again provided through in-class sessions and work experiences, each initially four weeks in duration. And again, students were given a credit for completing each segment.

Much to our surprise and discomfort, the program encountered immediate and severe growing pains. We may have been unrealistically overconfident in the planning stage due to the fact that previous projects had gone relatively smoothly. Yet many recalcitrant adolescents in Northern Lights simply got up and walked out. It is difficult to engage students who are no longer there. In retrospect, it is easy to see that we had misread a number of variables, including the extent of the drug and alcohol abuse, the pull of ever-recruiting youth gangs, and the fact that even the serious students in the group had limited experience with sitting, listening, and attending to academic material. Many of the teens also felt the need for more emphasis to be placed upon cultural heritage and identity.

It became self-evident that some fine tuning was in order, so we adjusted on the fly. Of Métis descent herself, the facilitator sought ways to increase the cultural content during in-class sessions. More of the day was devoted to discussing personal problems, dealing with group concerns, and fitting in the sacrosanct “smoke breaks.” In effect, much more time and energy were spent—in true CPS fashion—tackling real-life issues. Because so many of the youth were “crying out” for mentoring support, the work experience phase was also increased from four to five weeks.

From a systems perspective, the school divisions also made major adjustments. One freed up a psychologist to oversee the goings-on and strengthen communication among students, teachers, parents, and workplace mentors. Another brought their Aboriginal social worker directly into the project—he became partly responsible for choosing and counselling students, reaching out to the families, and connecting with the First Nations communities. The third actually hired their own Aboriginal social worker and educational assistant to help develop growth plans, support students and their parents, and monitor work placements. And all the divisions began to tie Northern Lights participants more closely to local intervention centres offering academic tutoring, computer-assisted learning, and specific enrichment programs.
Northern Lights: Outcomes, Observations, and Evaluation

Once we worked the bugs out, things moved along more smoothly. In all, 34 male and 24 female Aboriginal students—the majority between 16 and 18 years of age—began the in-class session. Looking at the downside first, of the original group, 8 dropped out the moment the project started. And 10 of the 50 remaining students (who finished one or two credits) had difficult life experiences following the program: 4 were out of school, without work, and adrift, 1 was receiving treatment for mental health concerns, 1 had developed a serious physical disability, 2 were single mothers on social assistance, 1 was incarcerated in the youth centre, and, tragically, 1 had committed suicide.

Still, despite these unfortunate occurrences, the overall outcomes were encouraging. Table 2 shows the 1999 current status of the 40 other students who completed one or two credits. We were unable to track 2 of these individuals, but 38 had either returned to school, graduated, or found employment. With 38 of the original 58 young people responding positively at some level, it might be argued that the success rate of the program was 65.52%. This result was not achieved easily, but it is similar to that of Lost Prizes. One way or another, there is no denying that Northern Lights had a much greater impact than earlier programs in the divisions, and that several disenfranchised Aboriginal youth experienced some measure of success due to the intervention.

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<td>Returned to and coping in high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attending school and holding a part-time job</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrolled in an adult education program</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months or less from high school graduation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated from high school</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated and employed full-time</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>
As we were planning the original *Lost Prizes*, some members of our team were asked to develop an intervention program for First Nation inmates in our provincial jails. Given the situation of Indigenous people in Manitoba and the issues in correctional facilities, that proposition was about as “at risky” as it gets. Still, it occurred to us that those who “make it” in today’s world tend to arrive at decisions by considering the social-cultural context, selecting wisely from among possibilities, and responding in ways that meet their own needs and fit within prevailing norms. Perhaps inmates, many of whom continually re-offend, might not be adept at that sort of problem solving. Since CPS had already proven so effective in a number of school programs and in helping us in our planning, we wondered if it could be used to assist this population to evaluate situations, consider alternatives, and reach pragmatic solutions.

At the time we were approached by Human Resources Development Canada to design and deliver what became known as the *Second Chance* project, it had been determined that each inmate cost Canadian taxpayers $51,047 annually (Corrections Services of Canada, 1991). The situation was exacerbated by the fact that criminal acts tend to be repeated—a disproportionately large number of prisoners have had previous convictions. Gendreau, Madden, and Leipciger (1977) found that 65.6% of inmates in our country re-offended, and Canfield and Drinnan (1991) pointed out that recidivism rates are higher for Aboriginal populations.

As it turned out, *Second Chance* was actually our first foray into direct at-risk programming: It predated *Lost Prizes* by a bit and served as a trial run or pilot for that initiative. In-depth descriptions of *Second Chance*, which ran from 1992–93, have been offered in several earlier publications (McCluskey, Place, McCluskey, & Treffinger, 1998; Place & McCluskey, 1995; Place, McCluskey, McCluskey, & Treffinger, 2000). To review briefly, the project provided pre-release support—also in the form of Creative Problem Solving training, career awareness, and work experience— to First Nations Canadians incarcerated in Manitoba jails for drug offenses, fraud, break and entry, assault, physical or sexual abuse, and even murder (as a juvenile). Many had previous convictions. The 31 inmates (27 male; 4 female)—in separate treatment groups of 16 and 15—took part in an 11-week “life skills” classroom component, followed by a four-week supervised job placement. One early week of the in-class segment was devoted specifically to CPS, and then the tools learned were interwoven and practised in later sessions on anger management, conflict resolution, creative styles, peer pressure, relationship building, self-fulfilling prophecy, verbal and nonverbal communication, and career exploration (via interest inventories, resumé writing, interview simulations, and job searches).

Although this population was challenging, in some ways *Second Chance* was less difficult to manage than the programs for wayward youth. Perhaps most importantly, we were dealing, quite literally, with a captive audience: The participants were not going anywhere. And behaviour-wise, most of them—grateful for a real opportunity—were less difficult than one might have expected.
After the obligatory relationship building and stage setting with the inmates, we began the direct teaching portion of the CPS training. As per usual, our aim was to help them improve their problem-solving abilities and then, gradually, assess their own life situations. We encouraged the participants to develop a creative climate, use their own problem-solving styles effectively, and build those personal “toolboxs” of practical techniques. By training’s end, the emphasis had moved toward dealing with relevant issues, generating workable ideas, and taking meaningful action. The job placement portion of the project offered all individuals a chance to practise their newfound skills in an authentic, real-life context.

Second Chance: Outcomes, Observations, and Evaluation

Our mission was a successful one. After individuals in our two Second Chance groups had “done their time,” completed the program, and been released into society, they were monitored for a year to see if they would “go straight” or run afoul of the law once more. Simultaneously, unbeknownst to us, members of a matched group of First Nations offenders (selected by Corrections Canada)—from the same home communities as our participants—were monitored over the same period. In other words, people in this control group were simply warehoused through the correctional system in the traditional manner, and left to fend for themselves upon release. (Do the crime, do the time.) Unlike their Second Chance (experimental group) counterparts, they received no pre-release support whatsoever. The recidivism rates for the control group and the two Second Chance groups are compared in Figure 12.
This graph makes it abundantly clear that the project had a prodigious impact. Recidivism during the follow-up year was 90.32% (28 of 31) for the unsupported control group, but only 38.71% (12 of 31) for our “second chancers.” While the distressingly high rate of re-offending in the non-treated condition is an indictment of traditional judicial and penal practices, the results suggest that promising alternatives—featuring a combination of CPS and work experience—merit serious consideration from the justice system. Ten years later, we had the opportunity to do another follow-up. It was gratifying, to say the least, for the recidivism rate had held at 39%; the former inmates had turned their lives around, and kept them turned around for a decade.
At the University of Winnipeg (UW), we take seriously the fact that Hunt (1987) thought it necessary to admonish university types to put away their “little professors,” to remember that “in the beginning there was experience” (not a “blackboard”), and to show proper respect for the wisdom and work done by people in the field. And in our Faculty of Education, we are committed to getting into the community and working directly with teachers, agency personnel, parents, and needy children and youth.

Prism, which took place in 1999, was an early step in that direction. The project itself was inspired by the aforementioned Prism Metaphor for Reversing Underachievement, and the companion study undertaken by Baum, Renzulli, and Hébert (1995). As discussed in a previous section of this monograph, their intent was to use Type III enrichment activities like a prism to focus and unleash the talent of underachieving gifted students. And again, as introduced in Renzulli’s (1977) pivotal work, the goal of Type III enrichment is to give students a chance to become actual investigators of relevant problems and bring their results to bear on real-life situations.

Building upon this earlier research, our UW team sought to extend the paradigm beyond the narrow gifted spectrum to include talent development for other at-risk populations (Renzulli, Baum, Hébert, & McCluskey, 1999). With funding support from Human Resources Development Canada, we decided to spearhead one of many moves from theory to practice at the University of Winnipeg by putting our own version of Prism into place.

In our variation on the original theme, the diverse participant group ended up consisting of eight young adults—men and women in their late teens or early 20s—who had been identified as at risk by various social service personnel. Half were Aboriginal. Some possessed clearly visible talents; others did not. Most had not completed high school. Essentially, then, the Prism participants were underachieving youth who lacked the experience, education, motivation, or opportunity to establish careers or construct fulfilling lives for themselves. They were known to social agencies because of their negative, maladaptive behaviour and their “acting out” in the community.

These individuals all passed through the “prism” of Type III enrichment, which included workshop information sessions on ADHD, conflict resolution, nonverbal communication, time management, organizational skills, and other topics they had identified as personal concerns. For the first one-month phase of the program, they also received in-depth career awareness training involving interest and aptitude assessment, résumé preparation, interview simulations, and job-finding strategies. As well, one solid week of the month was devoted entirely to CPS training, where—as per our usual approach—participants developed creative and critical thinking skills to apply to their immediate and future decision making.
As part of the extended *Prism* experience, we moved on for another month to the intensive mentoring component. For this phase, we hired several pre-service teachers from our university to act as mentors and enrichment-activity guides. Since the project took place in a rural setting, considerable travel was involved. Each of the eight participants was matched with a mentor according to individual needs and interests. The objective here was to build upon the skills and knowledge imparted to the participants in the first month by offering intensive, individualized Type III enrichment through mentoring designed to actively engage them and reverse their underachievement. During five debriefing meetings, members of our project team met with mentors to explore possible activities including apprenticeships, community projects, job shadowing, and our specialty—the pursuit of formal post-secondary education. It goes without saying that the mentoring relationships and experiences were unique for each mentor-mentee pair.

**Prism: Outcomes, Observations, and Evaluation**

In “action research” projects, particularly ones of this sort with a small and diverse client group, it is not easy to quantify successes. A variety of pre- and post-tests (using inventories measuring self-concept, career interests, life stresses, and so on) did not provide much in the way of tangible information in this instance. One instrument, however—administered almost as an afterthought—did yield some suggestive results.

For many decades now, Rotter (1966, 1973, 1975), Nowicki and Strickland (1973), and others have created and worked with questionnaires to measure locus of control. Taking their theoretical perspective, individuals with what is termed an internal locus of control believe, to a very large extent, that they are in charge of their own destinies. In contrast, those with an external locus of control feel that their futures will be determined predominantly by fate—life is, to them, essentially a crapshoot. It has been argued, quite convincingly as it turns out, that internally directed people are likely to be more independent and better able to plan ahead than their more external counterparts. It has even been suggested that internal locus of control folk are less likely to smoke, and much more likely to buckle their seat belts in cars, resist peer pressure, and practise birth control (cf. Myers, 1987).

As part of our pre- and post-testing in *Prism*, we had our participants complete Nowicki and Strickland’s Locus of Control Scale. The 40-item, yes-no instrument includes questions such as “Do you believe that most problems will solve themselves if you just don’t fool with them?,” “Are some people just born lucky?,” “Do you believe that if somebody studies hard enough he or she can pass any subject?,” and “Do you think it’s better to be smart than to be lucky?” A low score on this questionnaire indicates an internal locus of control, and vice versa.
Interestingly, among our *Prism* participants, locus of control scores went down after the two-month intervention. Table 3 shows that while the responses and magnitude of the difference varied markedly from person to person, in every case participants scored lower (i.e., toward the more internal, independent direction) following the combined class sessions, CPS, and mentoring “treatment.” When a non-independent two-tailed $t$-test was applied to these data, that difference was found to be significant ($t = 3.719$, $df = 7$, $p < .01$). Again, given the small $n$ and other confounding variables, one should not jump to conclusions here. Still, the trend might cause one to speculate that this type of intervention just may build resilience in at-risk individuals by helping them to become more self-assured and inner-directed. Additional research is required to examine this possibility more thoroughly.

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From where we now sit, however, data should be viewed as more than just numbers. Words, opinions, and personal observations can tell us a great deal about “what went down” in any particular program. With that in mind, it is worth considering the remarks of two of our pre-service teachers, and their mentees, as they commented about their *Prism* mentoring experiences (Bergsgaard, Land, & Myles, 2003). To maintain confidentiality, the names of the young people have been changed.

One mentor, Elizabeth Myles, put it this way:

> My first insight into “Meghan” came through a brief autobiographical sketch. . . . The profile presented was that of a teenage mom living in an abusive relationship, a high school dropout, and former foster child. . . . She wanted to be heard. She laid her life story before me, chapter by chapter. . . . Within a matter of hours, I felt a strong connection to Meghan. The genuine baring of her soul, willingness to accept me as her mentor, and keenness to proceed with the setting of both academic and personal goals impressed me. . . . Before entering the *Prism* program she was floating aimlessly, and feeling hopelessly stuck in a rut.
Meghan required not only an academic component, but also a plan for her social and emotional development. She was desperate to have someone hear her, and accept her with her flaws and bruises. . . . It seemed that every week there was a different man in her life. . . . She wanted to be nurtured and loved. . . . Meghan had spent years breaking rules as a cry for help and attention. Instead of being heard with concern and understanding, her pleas had been met with discipline and punishment. In hindsight, I feel Meghan fell through the cracks of our society. . . . My role became that of an active listener; someone who could mirror back her feelings with the conviction that they were legitimate.

During the mentoring process, Meghan practised driving and obtained her beginners’ permit. This not only gave her a new sense of freedom, but also allowed her to feel success for the first time in a long while. . . . To address her academic needs, we reviewed her past school records and agreed that there was a need to continue from Grade 10 and concentrate on full-time studies at the Adult Education Centre. Through many discussions and exploring career information, Meghan decided she wanted to become a legal secretary. I obtained information from several community and private colleges to give to Meghan. Her career goal was now becoming more specific: continue working toward her high school diploma and, upon successful completion, register in the legal secretary course at a private college. Meghan registered for three of her six required Grade 12 credits for her high school diploma (and eventually graduated). She reported daily to the Centre to work on her courses in law, family studies, and mathematics. She also met with me every two weeks to discuss social and emotional issues and work through academic challenges. For Meghan, both pieces of the puzzle needed to fit for success.

My fear was that although the seed for learning had been successfully planted, Meghan would easily slip back into her old lifestyle and lose focus without continued social and emotional support. . . . Rome wasn’t built in a day; it will take time and support for her to be successful in reaching her goals. (p. 98–101)

Meghan, in conversation, reported that

I have a new purpose in life. I’m feeling a sense of accomplishment in finishing high school, and I’m looking forward to taking the legal secretary course. I think I can do it. I know there will be some problems to work through, but I believe I am ready to handle them now.

Ryan Land, another mentor, wrote in his log:

“Evan” (a capable but bitter, 19-year-old from an unsettled home situation) was angry at the school system which he believed had failed and, ultimately, expelled him; he seemed to be in perpetual conflict with certain people.

I found myself asking a number of questions at the time. How might I give Evan the academic and inspirational nudge he needs in order to move beyond secondary education? How can I begin to encourage him to believe that he is capable and deserving of the pursuit of his goals, whatever they may be?
And finally, how will it be possible for me to convince him to avoid dwelling on his losses, in order to get him motivated to achieve success, without denying him the feelings that I know little or nothing about? . . . I've resisted his subtle attempts at confrontation by asking him to take very small risks in the beginning, so that they did not seem like risks to him at all.

Evan’s exposure to Creative Problem Solving was useful. It gave him the ability and confidence to contribute to his future rather than watching events and people (including me) “happen” to him. He slowly got into the habit of being proactive in the face of adversity, rather than constantly perceiving himself as victim. . . . When he was provisionally accepted at university, Evan’s grin was wrapped almost completely around his head. . . . I am pleased to be able to add that Evan met his commitment and . . . eventually completed an Education course with flying colors. Evan . . . made an impressive and measurable beginning in the attempt to reverse his underachievement, though it is not possible to say for certain who “mentored” whom. And I like that.

Evan also wrote some comments, working them—entirely of his own volition—into a university exam and a term paper.

I spoke (to my mentor). This was the beginning of what I consider an important relationship in my life. . . . It was a great feeling for me to know that someone believed in my abilities, and would help me along the way. I feel it’s one thing to tell someone that he has the potential for greater things, but it’s another to actually get in there and help. . . . Ryan and I seemed to connect the very first time we met. We had similar interests . . . and his “never say never” attitude was refreshing. He is one of the most compassionate people that I have ever met. . . . Ryan was very supportive throughout my whole ordeal (a drinking and driving charge during the project), and he helped me keep a somewhat positive outlook on things. I eventually worked things out, but I don’t think—actually, I’m pretty sure—that I couldn’t have done it without Ryan’s help. . . . When I had to go write my school tests, nearly a month after Prism had concluded, Ryan was kind enough to pick me up, let me stay at his house, and take me back home. I have family members who wouldn’t do this (and other things) for me, yet Ryan had no problem with it.

Prior to my involvement in the project, I was heavily into drugs and alcohol—I was headed for destruction. As a participant in Prism, I went from high school dropout to university student in one year. . . . The educational system is not adequate for at-risk students. The curriculum is sometimes boring. The attendance policies are too strict and the teachers aren’t usually very supportive of at-risk students. . . . Type III enrichment really opens the door for a variety of options. The main focus of the Type III intervention was on mentoring. I personally found this experience to be wonderful, as my mentor opened my eyes to all the possibilities I could have, either through his expression of his own life experiences or through simple things that I’m sure most kind people do everyday. . . . I ended up in a totally new group of peers. . . . The attitude change I went through in a mere couple of weeks might be
considered amazing, as I feel I was once a lost cause. I am now enjoying everything I can, even things I never liked before.

The Creative Problem Solving training was a different experience, to say the least . . . CPS teaches valuable lessons, not only for at-risk children and youth, but for non-at-risk as well. I found that participation in the CPS process left me equipped to make better decisions, determined to continue my education, and eager to prove to myself and others that I could make it.

Now my path to nowhere in society has taken a complete turn, from high school dropout to university hopeful. It all seemed to happen so fast that, in hindsight, I never really had a chance to reflect on what was going on. Like so many at-risk students, I knew myself that the potential was there; it just needed to be tapped. *Prism* did that for me.

We were pleased to see our UW students, Elizabeth and Ryan, complete their Education degrees and move on to various teaching positions and eventually into administration. As this monograph goes to press, Elizabeth is principal of École Beausejour Early Years School, and Ryan has moved on to the world of industry and is Manager of Corporate Affairs for Vale’s Manitoba Operations. Looking back, both view the formative *Prism* mentoring experience as an important part of their growth as educators.

In reality, in-the-trenches projects rarely go the way they are supposed to go. Indeed, carefully laid plans often end up giving way to seat-of-the-pants adaptations. Undoubtedly, there were all sorts of shortcomings with this project. For one reason or another, far fewer young people participated than had been targeted originally. The academic abilities and experiences of the group were also much more varied than had been anticipated at the outset. And, due both to our inexperience and an unavoidable time squeeze, the mentors were not sufficiently prepared for the challenge confronting them. Be that as it may, after hearing and reading feedback from the mentors and mentees, we are convinced that *Prism* has made a genuine difference in the lives of many of them. As well, as the following section will show, it led to other significant projects.

Mentoring to Develop the Talents of At-Risk Populations

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

*Søren Kierkegaard*

When our team first began the *Lost Prizes* journey, we had—like many others—used mentoring only in programs for gifted students. At the time, of the 913 studies reviewed in their annotated bibliography, Noller and Frey (1994) found only 36 examples where mentoring was used with at-risk populations. That state of affairs has changed over the years, and now mentoring is routinely employed as a strategy to support marginalized individuals. Back then, however, that was not the case, and only three pieces from the original review focused directly on mentoring for talented at-risk children and youth. *Lost Prizes* sought to address that situation.
Research during the past two decades has shown that mentoring can have a powerful positive effect on vulnerable youth by sharpening their decision-making skills (Ferguson & Snipes, 1994), improving school attendance (Lee, Luppino, & Plionis, 1990), and reducing drug usage (LoSciuto, Rajala, Townsend, & Taylor, 1996). Certainly, it seems clear that mentoring has had a significant impact on young people served by Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Grossman & Tierney, 1998) and on economically disadvantaged children and youth from minority cultural groups (Royce, 1998; Torrance, Goff, & Satterfield, 1998).

Mentoring can build social capital by connecting students with caring adults. In meta-analyses of 55 and 73 studies published through 1998 and from 1999 to 2010 respectively that assessed the impact of mentoring programs, DuBois and his colleagues identified many benefits of mentoring, especially for at-risk youth (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). However, they noted as well that ill-conceived projects have the potential to do harm. Clearly, if mentoring initiatives are to be successful, they must be designed, implemented, and evaluated very carefully. Critical elements include fostering strong relationships between mentors and mentees, preparing mentors well and offering them support and direction right off the bat, and assessing outcomes objectively. It is also essential that mentoring relationships do not end prematurely; they must be given sufficient time to grow and develop (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012).

At California State University, Fresno, a large-scale initiative, provided significant support to young, high-risk students (Meyer, 1997). In that program, pre-service teachers mentored needy elementary school children from local communities. In other words, mentoring was used to help address issues of cultural diversity, parental neglect, poverty, transient lifestyles, and low academic achievement. What could be better training for pre-service teachers than to establish real relationships with at-risk children? And what might such support mean for youngsters much in need of attention, understanding, and direction? Through this project, collegians worked with the children in the schools—typically twice a week at day’s end. The amount of person-power involved was considerable: By late 1997, there were 180 pre-service teachers in the program. Undoubtedly, many lives have been touched through this work.

Following the lead of this and other ventures, from 1999 to the present our team has launched a number of mentoring programs through UW’s Faculty of Education (Lamoureux, McCluskey, Wiebe, & Baker, 2008; McCluskey & Mays, 2003; Wiebe, in press; Wiebe, McCluskey, Van Bockern, Brendtro, & Brokenleg, in press). These programs have proven to be attractive to our students, effective, and sustainable. It should be said that while the mentoring initiatives stand apart from Lost Prizes in many ways, the two are in other respects inextricably intertwined. We certainly rely heavily on mentoring in Lost Prizes and spin-off projects, and the principles embodied in those projects invariably find their way into the mentoring training and service delivery at the University. As well, all our team members are involved in both programs, which results in a fair amount of overlap of ideas and strategies.
Although not the case in the early days of *Lost Prizes*, mentoring is now definitely seen as a valuable tool for connecting with at-risk gifted students (Neihart, 2011).

In any case, UW pre-service teachers who complete our Enrichment and Talent Development, our Issues with At-Risk Children and Youth, or our other related courses are eligible to become mentors to disadvantaged young people in inner-city Winnipeg. Aside from introducing CPS, the LoS Model, RAP, LSCI, Circle of Courage, and other strength-based approaches for talent development (Smith, 2006), these courses cover topics such as alternative education (Baker, 2008), bullying (Hoover & Oliver, 2008), gangs (Goldstein & Kodluboy, 1998), resilience (Brendtro & Larson, 2006; Krovetz, 1999; Lantieri, 2008; McMahon, 2006, 2007; Unger, 2005), social and cultural capital (Bergsgaard & Sutherland, 2003), practical strategies for dealing with real-life issues (Stewart, 1999, 2002), learning disabilities and ADHD (Bender, 2007; McCluskey & McCluskey, 2001), “unfriendly” school practices (McCluskey, 2000a), and employing dynamic assessment to identify “invisible” Aboriginal underachievers with high academic potential (Chaffey & Bailey, 2003; Chaffey, McCluskey, & Halliwell, 2005).

The point is, of course, that our pre-service teachers are not just thrown willy-nilly into the breach: They are extremely well prepared and bring relevant knowledge and talent to their mentoring relationships. Chosen from among the ranks of interested students, these mentors take part in what is essentially a practicum providing the experiential link between theory and the real world. To summarize, the pre-service teachers mentor for four hours or so per week for one university term. Very frequently, though, the experience gets extended: Many mentors warm to their mentees, put in far more time each week than expected, and continue their involvement long after the practicum officially comes to an end. While the courses are run in fairly traditional fashion—with tests, term papers, and letter grades—the Mentoring Practicum itself is much more flexible. Mentors are connected with mentees on an as-needed basis, and meetings take place whenever it is most convenient for the individuals involved (including evenings and weekends). Since we did not want to take away from the focus on the relationship, pass-fail grades are assigned based upon “following through” and recording experiences in personal reaction logs. In their logs, mentors note down their objectives, action plans, strengths and needs of the mentee, supports and resources provided, successes, concerns, and possible follow-up issues. Contact hours, meeting times, and other observations are included as well. Detailed reaction logs are key when it comes to evaluating outcomes.

In many of our past projects at the University of Winnipeg (Lamoureux, McCluskey, Wiebe, & Baker, 2008; McCluskey & Mays, 2003), “interplanetary” mentoring has been used to identify and nurture the talents of marginalized young people: MARS (Mentoring At-Risk Students) focused on reclaiming gang-involved Aboriginal “street kids,” PLUTO (Please Let Us Take Off) supported inner-city elementary schools, SATURN (Storefront Activities To Unleash Resilience and Nurturing) helped parents develop the literacy skills of their preschoolers,
NEPTUNE (Nurturing Enrichment Programming Through University Networking and Empowerment) facilitated higher-order projects with gifted students in a school division, and EARTH (Encouraging Autonomy and Responsibility in Teen Households)—a partnership with Child and Family Services—offered direction to adolescents in independent living situations. As we tell our funders, if they have the money, we have the planets.

Our newer mentoring projects, involving pre-service teachers currently in our Faculty, have been described elsewhere (Wiebe, in press). They include Three Stars and a Wish (to guide Aboriginal and immigrant children through a writing and relationship-building process) and the Newcomer After-School Program at a local high school (to assist under-served immigrants). The Global Welcome Centre at UW also reaches out to refugees and newcomers to Canada, a population desperately in need of guidance, direction, and tangible assistance if they are to fulfill their intellectual potential (Magro, 2008/09; Stewart, 2011), so our mentors provide regular support there as well.

About 50 pre-service teachers participate in the mentoring experience each year. They partner with community groups to support at-risk, talented, war-affected, and other children and youth in the inner city. Rich data are obtained through the reaction logs and mentee questionnaires. In these tough economic times, such mentoring initiatives offer a low-cost method to reach out to marginalized youth, provide hands-on training for student teachers, create professional development opportunities for in-service educators and other community caregivers, and collect objective information about the impact of the approach. It is a powerful way for teachers of the future to gain experience “where the action is,” while at the same time serving as role models and building relationships with truly needy young people. In short, it is a win-win scenario. Pre-service teacher mentors get front-line interaction with at-risk children and youth, and the young mentees benefit from desperately needed relationships and support. During the past decade, faculty members in Education have gathered a wealth of data from the various mentoring ventures, including a large number of questionnaires and reaction logs. A forthcoming monograph will present detailed theoretical background, outcome data, information analysis, and project evaluations (Wiebe, McCluskey, Van Bockern, Brendtro, & Brokenleg, in press).
The Evolving *Lost Prizes* Model and Programs

“Nothing endures but change.” *Heraclitus*

With the completion of *Northern Lights* and *Prism* in 1999, it seemed as if the *Lost Prizes*-based interventions had officially run their course. For a few years thereafter, we used them as exemplars and teaching tools in our university classes, but by 2002 through 2005—feeling dated, stale, and a trifle typecast—we decided we were done. For a spell, we simply did not talk much about the projects anymore.

However, members of our team were remotivated and brought back to the *Lost Prizes* work by Taisir Subhi Yamin (at present, President of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children and General Director of the International Centre for Innovation in Education), and prevailed upon by him to give several presentations on the topic at some major international conferences. Much to our surprise, the response from educators in other countries was tremendously encouraging: Many asked for our help in establishing similar projects in their settings.

We also experienced embarrassment when a number of foreign scholars asked to come to Manitoba to tour our (now discontinued) programs. Fortuitously, some of the undertakings that had grown out of or alongside *Lost Prizes* still existed—staffed by a new generation of teachers—in the school divisions (e.g., the *Regional Support Centre* in Lord Selkirk and the community-school partnerships, *Wings of Power and Network for Change*, in Sunrise). And new *Lost Prizes*-type undertakings have emerged, such as *The Infinity Program* in Interlake, an “education without limits” approach featuring altruistic fundraising by students and a powerful *Lost and Found* component. Inspired and revitalized by the interest from afar, this past year members of our UW team helped design and deliver the *Talent Identification and Development in Education at Sisler (TIDES)* initiative to engage talented, at-risk Aboriginal students at our province’s largest high school (through drama, photography, and CPS sessions) and the *Transition Program* at the Manitoba Youth Centre to prepare incarcerated youth for release back into their home communities. We are more sanguine now that our international guests do in fact have active sites to visit.

In an attempt to broaden and firm up the application of *Lost Prizes* principles and strategies, a few of us developed the model in Figure 13 to guide training, programming, and research at home and abroad. There is yet work to be done, but the completed version—with far more detailed descriptions of the underlying rationale, key ingredients, and curricular components—will soon be available (McCluskey, Lamoureux, Baker, & Treffinger, in press).
The Lost Prizes Model for Talent Development (McCluskey, Lamoureux, Baker, & Treffinger, in press). Used with permission of the International Centre for Innovation in Education.

The Model, which has clearly grown out of earlier formulations (particularly the Amphitheater schematic), incorporates and addresses several important elements that should become part of the repertoire of Lost Prizes practitioners:

- **Social Dimensions**, presented as five rather than three Rs: Reframing, Respect, Responsibility, Relationships, and Resilience. One can even associate each of these five Rs with titles and lyrics from popular songs sung by well-known musicians: Reframing—*The Future So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades* by Timbuk 3; Respect—*R-E-S-P-E-C-T, Find Out What It Means To Me* by Aretha Franklin; Responsibility—*He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother* by the Hollies; Relationships—*Help, I Need Somebody* by The Beatles; and Resilience—*Hit Me with Your Best Shot* by Pat Benatar.

- **Training**, which is undertaken in four steps: Stage-setting—the direct teaching of information and strategies; Enhancing—facilitator-guided practice in a safe, comfortable setting; Evolving—a move to self-directed learning involving independent and collaborative activities and real-world applications; and Serving—the attainment of meaning and satisfaction by helping others through service learning and servant leadership (the acronym is SEES).

- **Programming Strands**, consisting of Diversity, Identification, Values, Inquiry, Nurturance, and Enrichment (DIVINE).
Foundation Blocks, of **Mentoring, Evaluation, Research, Inclusion, and Tone** (MERIT). It is a bit of a stretch, but in terms of a mnemonic, here one SEES a DIVINE intervention based on MERIT.

Of course, there are some specific objectives for programs that receive the *Lost Prizes* designation:

- to use research to guide and inform planning, and to employ best practices in the gifted education and at-risk domains
- to establish innovative academic and social programs to identify and develop the talents of high-ability, at-risk young people
- to help students learn more effective coping and problem-solving strategies
- to take a strength-based rather than a deficit approach for unengaged youth
- to embrace and respond to a diverse set of student needs and challenges
- to encourage educators to become “talent spotters,” who look for positives in their students on a daily basis
- to develop the skills of practitioners working with marginalized young people
- to utilize a variety of assessment strategies to gauge and improve student academic and social progress in tangible and specific ways
- to share lessons learned with the field (through professional development sessions, courses, and publications)

### Establishing *Lost Prizes* Centres/Programs/Schools

Our team at UW envisions various levels of *Lost Prizes* intervention:

- **Centres**—which will set the stage for more direct involvement with children and youth by first offering training in the enrichment, at-risk, and related realms. *Lost Prizes* Centres, then, would provide the facilities, materials, and human resources necessary to make concrete training (of trainers) possible.

- **Programs**—where, after being thoroughly prepared for the challenge, educators and youth workers use the *Lost Prizes* philosophy and approach directly in their work with young people

- **Schools**—in which *Lost Prizes* principles are embodied and practised at all levels throughout the institution
Training Is Essential

“Those who are ready to go are already invited.” Henry David Thoreau

Although many educators believe they possess the theoretical background and practical skills to work effectively with talented, at-risk kids, most really do not have solid grounding in the area. It is a pity, for good preparation can make a tremendous difference—the more we know, the more we will be equipped to support this challenging population (Long, 2010). From where we sit, certain training is a must.

Lost Prizes Foundation and Support Courses

As part of the Lost Prizes training, a series of what might be called core or “foundation” courses—each three days in length (6 hours per day for a total of 18 contact hours)—have been developed to help educators acquire basic competencies. Aside from the pivotal training discussed earlier (CPS, LSCI, RAP, Developmental Audit, and the Renzulli Learning System), there are offerings entitled ADHD: Disorder or Gift?; Creating Creative, Cooperative Environments Creatively and Cooperatively; Gifted Education, Enrichment, and Talent Development; Lines in the Sand: Are Certain Students Being Marginalized in our System?; Mentoring for Resilience; and Recognizing and Nurturing the Talent of Lost Prizes.

There are, as well, some three-day “support” courses that are also relevant for educators dealing with certain specialized populations: Bullying and Teasing at School: Angry Words, Angry Minds; Developing Resilient Young People; Educators and the Law; Effective Use of Educational Assistants in the Classroom; Establishing Effective Programs for Disengaged Youth; Facilitating Problem Solving with Early Years Students; Gender and Sexual Diversity; Indigenous Education: An Introduction; Just and Effective Education; Learning Disabilities: Addressing Hidden Problems; Real-Life Issues in the School Setting; Social Skills Training; Special Education: An Overview; Teaching English as an Additional Language; and Trends and Topics in Education.

Formal Credit

These Lost Prizes foundation and support courses are valuable in many ways:

- Importantly, this training will be of great assistance to educators working with high-ability and/or at-risk populations.
- Upon completion of five of these courses (at least two of which must be selected from the foundation group), participants will receive a Lost Prizes Certificate from the division of Professional, Applied and Continuing Education (PACE) at the University of Winnipeg.
- Participants who complete five additional courses after earning their Certificate (for a total of 10 overall) will receive a UW PACE Lost Prizes Advanced Certificate. At least four of the 10 courses must be from the foundation category.
It is expected that additional Lost Prizes courses will be developed and approved for credit in the near future (especially in the areas of alternative programming, special education, and school administration).

If approved by UW, certain post-graduate Education courses may be applied toward the aforementioned Certificate and Advanced Certificate. Some courses from other institutions may also be evaluated and credited in the same manner.

If approved by UW, certain of the Lost Prizes courses may be counted as electives toward the B.Ed. degree (with each three-day course valued at 1.5 credit hours). Alternatively, with permission (and if extra assignments are completed), these courses may also be used toward UW's Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Education (PBDE) or toward our cooperative Master's programs with other institutions. Participants can apply their foundation and support course credits simultaneously toward their Lost Prizes Certificates and toward their undergraduate or postgraduate programs. However, these courses can only be used for either undergraduate or postgraduate credit, not both.

International Opportunities

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.” Mark Twain

The experience of all our Lost Prizes team members definitely supports the folk wisdom of Twain’s quotation, for we have gained a considerable appreciation for other lifestyles and cultures as we have visited, talked, and collaborated with educators abroad. It has been especially eye-opening for us to observe young children from different countries at work and at play in their elementary schools throughout the world. They seem so engaging, free of prejudice, and happy. If all North Americans could have this experience, a great deal of prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness would indeed cease to exist.

In the face of globalization, and with the advantage of common understanding and the desire to promote well-being for others, more and more academics are doing more and more thinking about world citizenship. Because “globalization has led to the internationalization of gifted education and increased social interaction,” it has become necessary to develop a new vision for the discipline (Yamin, 2011, p. 3). For Nussbaum (1997), there are three ingredients to global citizenship: understanding oneself and one’s traditions (true self-reflection); viewing oneself as connected to and concerned about all human beings wherever they may live (social capital); and having the ability to imagine and appreciate the perspective of those from different backgrounds (i.e., being able to take the place of the other). The last assertion has been echoed with great vigour by Schattle (2008). Appiah (2006) too has emphasized the need for people from all lands to respect cultural differences, have conversations across those differences, and learn from each other.
It makes sense to suggest, as Kaldor (2003) has done, that creating a global civil society in which all people are equal members is ultimately the only way to address the world’s problems. Therefore, it is exciting for us to read about the growing trend for high schools and universities in North America to develop international practicum programs (Schultz & Jorgenson, 2009). The vision for our Faculty is to pick up on the positives, to move beyond a local focus by embracing global citizenship, and to transform ourselves into an Education program for the world.

In the spirit of global citizenship, we are responding to calls to help establish *Lost Prizes* Centres/Programs/Schools in other countries. University of Winnipeg personnel will—after consulting with their international partners, examining the conditions, and fine-tuning plans to fit the local needs—provide support in four “waves”:

- **Initial, on-site training.** Educators in partnering countries will receive direct training from UW faculty, staff, and designated “program associates.”
- **Start-up guidance, direction, and mentoring.** After our foreign partners have been prepared for the challenge, seasoned veteran administrators from Manitoba will work in the school or alternative program—for one to two years—to help set the tone, overcome initial obstacles, develop skills, and provide in-the-trenches assistance.
- **Assumption of full responsibility.** After the periods of training and mentoring have been completed, our partners will take full charge of the schools and programs in their countries.
- **Follow-up.** In an effort to prevent gradual programmatic erosion and deterioration, Manitoba educators will provide ongoing follow up and assistance as necessary. To ensure sustainability, younger, prepared-at-UW teachers will be trained to carry on the work over the long term (as the seasoned veterans and project initiators secure the gains by, in effect, replacing themselves).

It should be emphasized that the intent here is not to create a high-priced franchise system or to charge exorbitant consultant fees and then disappear from the scene. For the initial training and follow-up portions of this endeavour, UW personnel will be asking only to have their transportation, food, accommodation, and cost of materials covered. (At most, should one be offered, they will accept only a small stipend.) Naturally, administrators from Manitoba who work directly in a school or program during the start-up phase will need to be paid (but only at the same rate as educators in the country being served) for the year or two in question.

Currently, University of Winnipeg faculty members have a lot going on in the international arena. Lenna Glade (in press) is spearheading our practicum program in Thailand, where—through the generosity and support of Seri Parndejpong and Gary Smith (Director and Assistant Director of Lertlah Schools)—a new *Lost Prizes* Free School called Por Peang (i.e., Self-Sufficiency) will soon be built for village children in Buriram. Other Prototype Demonstration Centres are also being planned for Bangkok and elsewhere in the country. Projects in other sites in Asia
may follow. Professor Humphrey Oborah from Kenya will soon be opening a *Lost Prizes* Program and School in Nairobi and a Training Centre in Kisumu. Dr. Nabil Kharman, Headmaster at Al Sa’adah College School in Amman, Jordan, is setting the stage for *Lost Prizes* programs there, while Licenciado Carlos Ferrer is to be the driving force behind a Training Centre in Merida, Mexico. It just goes on and on. Dr. Hava Vidergor is exploring possibilities in Israel, and—under the direction of John Anchan, our Associate Dean—we have just signed a new agreement with Dr. Grace George of the Alpha Group of Educational Institutions to support a *Lost Prizes* Centre and other projects in Chennai, India. Most recently, Dave Bell is collaborating with Bob Davisson, Founder/Director of Lifeline Haiti (a Division of Bridges of Hope), to determine how *Lost Prizes* might support children in that country.

Other of our UW faculty are also involved internationally: Don Metz and Laura Sokal are working toward building a school in Nicaragua (fundraising, labour, and teaching courtesy of students from the University of Winnipeg); Jan Stewart is surveying the situation in several African countries; Vern Barrett is coordinating a practicum in Germany; and Louesa Polyzoi is attempting to augment the practicum program she has established with the American Community (International Baccalaureate) School of Athens (ACS Athens). Some years back, Polyzoi also headed up a CIDA project, which represented our first UW international venture using the *Lost Prizes* methodology as part of the training for educators working to develop the talents of at-risk children and youth in Russia (Polyzoi, Bergsgaard, McCluskey, & Olifirovych, 2005). And there are many others, including our younger scholars, Kevin Lamoureux and Leah Gazan. As stated before, if there is to be sustainability, us old folk have to replace ourselves, and Lamoureux and Gazan—the “youngsters” on the scene—are making their mark not only by helping to develop international initiatives, but also by anchoring local *Lost Prizes* projects in our province’s schools, the Manitoba Youth Centre, and Aboriginal communities.

Inviting Additional Research

A document prepared by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (2011) has demonstrated clearly how essential it is for educators to become involved in action research. In a very real sense, comprehensive surveys and field studies that examine the effectiveness of assorted pedagogical approaches serve to gather and transmit information and to give practitioners a voice in what happens in teaching and learning.

Since their interest is primarily to make a tangible difference in the lives of talented, vulnerable children and youth, it is not uncommon for educators in the at-risk area to devote most of their attention to service delivery rather than research. That passion notwithstanding, it is nonetheless essential to be mindful of empirical rigour, to remain objective, to consider methodological approaches carefully, and to assess outcomes critically. Several of our new partners have chosen to evaluate their projects partly through pre- and post-measures of readily available data on
academic performance, school attendance, behavioural incidents, and contacts with the justice system. Some have even cut through the practitioner-researcher “tension” by separating the roles, such that teachers provide the direct face-to-face service, while statisticians are employed to monitor and assess the results.

In our own ongoing projects, we have upped the ante research-wise in several ways. One member of our team has designed the Circle of Courage Values Indicator (CoCVI), a questionnaire for individuals 11 years of age and older, which uses the Circle of Courage framework to evaluate the climate, tone, self-efficacy, and effectiveness of outreach programs (Lamoureux, in press). As well, we continue to gather an abundance of qualitative information from reaction logs, our primary source of information. Now, however, we are also applying the technique of content analysis (Carney, 1972; Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 2004; Krippendorff & Bock, 2008)—a research methodology for examining the content of communications (in our case, key words, phrases, and themes in the material)—to analyze these reflective journals in more depth. At the moment, in excess of 200 student logs are being “decoded” in an effort to identify salient elements in the mentoring process and, by extension, to determine how best to choose and train mentors efficiently (Wiebe, McCluskey, Van Bockern, Brendtro, & Brokenleg, in press). Fortunately, new software is speeding up the content analysis process and improving inter-coder reliability.

A difficulty with evaluating Lost Prizes–type projects stems from the fact that the goals are highly diffuse and idiosyncratic: Each participant has his or her own unique aims and vision. (To illustrate, students have identified personal targets such as getting higher grades in school, improving attendance, earning admission to university, developing social skills, stopping drinking or doing drugs, and extricating themselves from gang involvement. Objectives range from basic [e.g., practising better hygiene] to lofty [e.g., becoming a better person]. One never knows quite what to expect.) Content analysis injects, if you will, a degree of “objective subjectivity” into the mix by focusing on common themes or ingredients for success. In addition, goal attainment scaling (Kiresuk, Smith, & Cardillo, 1994)—a method whereby individual goals are set and, to a certain extent, quantified—is also being used to gauge outcomes. This technique allows us to help students identify three or four personal goals, to assess the progress in meeting them, to compare outcomes, and to make some inferences about the overall effectiveness of programs.

Our past and present work does, we hope, provide some useful information about how to engage a particularly vulnerable population. However, it also invites comment and suggests a further research agenda. There is clearly a need for more experimental/control group comparisons, for tracking more precisely the longitudinal impact of the interventions, and for parceling out and examining the effects of the different “treatments” and approaches. We encourage others to build and improve upon our efforts by exploring these and other variables in their own undertakings.
To facilitate dissemination of information and global sharing in this realm, funding has now been secured to establish *Lost Prizes: An International Journal on Talent Recognition and Development*. Karen Magro from our program, has been named as the first Editor of this semiannual publication. She will be supported by Joe Goulet (as Co-editor), some UNESCO colleagues, and a strong international team of reviewers.

**Final Thoughts**

“One original thought is worth a multitude of quotations.” Ken McCluskey

We have appreciated this opportunity to review many of our projects and pull together work from the past two decades. It has been good to think about where we have been, where we are, and where we are going. As noted elsewhere (McCluskey, in press, a), our team realizes that we have yet to achieve Nirvana. Indeed, we know we never will. As we go forward with our plans to put services in place for high-potential, unengaged young people, there will be many missteps, confusions, and criticisms. On the other hand, the alternative would simply be to do nothing; and for us that is no alternative at all. We expect and accept that there will be imperfections, but still intend to strive with flexibility, perseverance, and optimism to improve the lot of oft-neglected talented, at-risk children and youth who—if given hope, happiness, and half a chance—have the ability to make tremendous contributions in their countries and beyond.
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