Editorial and Introduction

Very seldom have the necessities, theories, and practices of counseling the gifted and talented been treated in this Journal. This does not mean that we underestimate the importance of this area of our profession. Not only do highly gifted and talented persons in need deserve counseling like everybody else, but societies, all people, profit from their development, achievements, and leadership.

We must admit, however, that, historically, all people and societies have not accepted this truth. Under the pressure of small budgets for counseling services and limited numbers of counselors, also in educational settings, it seemed more important to help the disadvantaged, the handicapped, the disturbed, and the less gifted. Gifted people can help themselves, people thought. It took almost a century of research to reveal the fact that this is not true. We now know much more about the sorrows and needs of extraordinary children, adolescents, and adults with outstanding abilities and achievements. There is an enlightening literature on giftedness, its nature, its development, and the necessities and the methods of helping gifted people to reach their potential and share their abilities with the rest of their societies.

Nevertheless, the standards of gifted education and counseling are still very diverse in our present world. Not only are there countries where special educational endeavours for the gifted and talented are unknown (for that reason colleagues were unable to answer our call for papers). But even within one society there are often great differences between various States or Provinces in this matter (see, e.g., Lupart et al. on Canada, in this volume).

In order to shed some light on the state of gifted education and counseling in various parts of the world, we have invited a number of knowledgable colleagues from various societies to report on the situation in their countries, and this IJAC Special Issue publishes the results. The authors were given a few guidelines so that a certain level of comparability could be reached. However, some colleagues from developing countries could not submit articles because in their societies other problems are more pressing.

It is impossible to understand the endeavours made in our field without insight into several contextual variables such as societal conditions, including the appreciation of giftedness. Fundamental are the educational systems: goals,
organization, curriculum; egalitarian or selective structures; integration vs. individualization; special arrangements for the gifted and talented, and so forth. These variables form the context in which the counseling needs of excellent students arise. Of course, authors were also asked to report on their definition and understanding of giftedness; on the methods of identification and selection of gifted children and adolescents; on the existence and organization of guidance and counseling for our target group in their countries; about agents of helping, theories, goals, and methods applied; and about the outcomes of gifted counseling. Finally, the various possible counselees were mentioned: mainly the gifted and talented themselves, their parents, and their teachers. Thus, when we speak of counseling, we mean it in its broadest sense to include educational and vocational guidance, and personal-emotional-social counseling in all sorts of problem situations.

Of course, it is impossible to cover all these topics thoroughly in one journal article. So authors were allowed to stress those points on the list, which are being emphasized in their country, which the authors see as most important, and/or of which they are experts. Thus, we are able to present a great variety of articles, which mirror the state of gifted counseling, research, and practice of their countries, but also mirror the authors’ expertise.

These articles that we publish reveal how differently societies treat their highly gifted and talented children and adolescents. They may cherish them or disregard them. The gifted are being identified, tested, selected, nourished, guided, and counselled, or they may be neglected or controlled and disciplined. The policies of gifted education, guidance, and counseling may be so deeply interconnected with the societies and their institutions, school systems, and curricula, that it is indeed impossible to treat the agents and the methods of counseling separately (see Vrignaud et al.: France). In spite of this diversity, it is possible to gain systematic knowledge and understanding of the theory, concepts, goals, and practices of gifted counseling.

All papers give an overview of the societal and educational context of gifted education and counseling in their countries. It makes a great difference, whether societies have a centralized governmental structure (see Vrignaud et al.: France or Persson: Sweden); whether education is controlled by federal States (see Lupart et al.: Canada or Heller: Germany); whether societies have an egalitarian or more liberal tradition (cf. Persson: Sweden; Heller: Germany; Vrignaud et al.: France); whether they pursue the goals of social integration or of the selection of an intellectual elite (see Cho and Yoon: Korea). Also, the gifted and the talented may be treated quite differently (Vrignaud et al.: France).

Of course, these societal factors are the basis of quite different educational structures. In selective, e.g., tripartite, secondary school systems (like mainly in Germany and France), gifted students find conditions of learning quite different from those in comprehensive school organizations (like Sweden or Canada). These school organizations may organize courses and “enrichment” for highly gifted and