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PERFECTIONISM:
A GROUP INTERVENTION WITH GIFTED FEMALES

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presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This thesis reports on an intervention with a group of 14-year-old gifted girls, designed to address issues of perfectionism that may be affecting them now and which might negatively impact on their future learning. The intervention was designed on the basis of a systems model of perfectionism. This model frames perfectionism as a consequence of a world view that over-emphasises performance at the expense of learning and experience. The intervention exposed participants to the need to balance performance, learning and experience in order to achieve sustainable life-long learning. The intervention involved a mix of Improvisational Drama, group conversation, identification of perfectionistic thinking, personal diaries, cost-benefit analysis and challenging of assumptions, conducted during the course of six one-hour workshops. The thesis presents the intervention predominantly in the form of case study descriptions of the six workshops.

A major finding of the case study was the value of intervention designed to meet the needs of participants who have not reached a clinically significant level of perfectionism. The term 'fledgling perfectionists' was coined to describe this 'at risk' group, and characteristics of fledgling perfectionists are described. Effective intervention with fledgling perfectionists requires a safe learning environment where they can explore perturbing concepts pertinent to their world view. Improvisational Drama conducted with a group that includes a mix of perfectionistic and non-perfectionistic participants contributes to such an environment. Effective intervention with fledgling perfectionists also requires the facilitator to take a developmental approach and to incorporate individual follow-up processes with fledgling perfectionists.