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**PERFECTIONISM:
A GROUP INTERVENTION WITH GIFTED
FEMALES**

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
Abstract	ix
CHAPTER 1: <i>Introduction</i>	1
1.1 Research purpose and objectives.....	1
1.2 Organisation of thesis	2
CHAPTER 2: <i>Literature Review</i>	4
2.1 Perfectionism.....	4
2.1.1 <i>Defining perfectionism</i>	4
2.1.2 <i>Core processes in perfectionism</i>	12
2.1.3 <i>Measuring perfectionism</i>	14
2.2 Defining giftedness.....	16
2.3 The link between giftedness and perfectionism.....	20
2.4 The need to help gifted female perfectionists.....	22
2.4.1 <i>Perfectionism and underachievement</i>	25
2.4.2 <i>Perfectionism and eating disorders</i>	26
2.4.3 <i>Perfectionism and teenage suicide</i>	28
2.4.4 <i>Perfectionism and the 'model student'</i>	31
CHAPTER 3: <i>Methodology</i>	32
3.1 The need for an intervention study.....	32
3.2 Use of case study	36
3.3 Collection of data	39
3.4 Selection of participants.....	43
3.5 Use of the Burns Perfectionism Scale.....	45
3.6 Analysis of data.....	46
CHAPTER 4: <i>Models influencing the study</i>	49
4.1 Development and maintenance of perfectionism	49
4.2 Conditions necessary to change the worldview of perfectionists ..	55
CHAPTER 5: <i>Development of the programme</i>	58
5.1 Use of improvisational drama	58

5.1.1	<i>Learning to fail</i>	59
5.1.2	<i>Learning to be flexible</i>	59
5.1.3	<i>'Coming into the moment'</i>	60
5.1.4	<i>Learning to laugh</i>	61
5.1.5	<i>Experiencing creativity in play</i>	62
5.1.6	<i>Confronting fear</i>	62
5.1.7	<i>Experiencing change and integration</i>	63
5.1.8	<i>Experiencing decisiveness</i>	63
5.2	<i>'Pleasure-predicting' sheet</i>	64
5.3	<i>'Sustainable Work' model</i>	66
5.4	<i>Group intervention</i>	66
CHAPTER 6: Workshop One		68
6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	68
6.1.1	<i>What happened with attendance?</i>	69
6.2	<i>Workshop One: Purpose</i>	71
6.3	<i>A description of workshop one</i>	72
6.4	<i>Plan for workshop one</i>	75
6.5	<i>Written questionnaire and focus group results</i>	76
6.5.1	<i>Dominant themes in girls' understanding of perfectionism</i>	76
6.5.2	<i>Dominant themes in girls understanding of giftedness</i>	83
6.5.3	<i>Identification of perfectionistic themes from group conversation</i> ...	86
6.6	<i>To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?</i>	93
6.6.1	<i>Getting to know one another</i>	93
6.6.2	<i>Creating a safe and trusting environment</i>	93
6.6.3	<i>Assessing girls' understanding of perfectionism and giftedness</i>	94
6.6.4	<i>Preliminary identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies</i> .	95
6.7	<i>After the workshop</i>	97
CHAPTER 7: Workshop Two		98
7.1	<i>Workshop Two: Purpose</i>	98
7.2	<i>A description of workshop two</i>	100
7.3	<i>Plan for workshop two</i>	105
7.4	<i>To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?</i>	106
7.4.1	<i>Raise girls' awareness of the costs of perfectionism</i>	106
7.4.2	<i>Familiarise girls with the PLE model</i>	107
7.4.3	<i>Creating a safe psychological environment</i>	109
7.4.4	<i>Identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies</i>	110
CHAPTER 8: Workshop Three		115
8.1	<i>Workshop Three: Purpose</i>	115
8.2	<i>A description of workshop three</i>	116
8.3	<i>Plan for workshop three</i>	121
8.4	<i>To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?</i>	122
8.4.1	<i>Explore improvisational drama</i>	122

8.4.2	<i>Challenge perfectionistic belief</i>	123
8.4.3	<i>Reinforce the PLE model</i>	124
8.4.4	<i>Identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies</i>	125
CHAPTER 9: Workshop Four		129
9.1	Workshop Four: Purpose.....	129
9.2	A description of workshop four	130
9.3	Plan for workshop four	134
9.4	To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?	134
9.4.1	<i>Explore healthy responses to criticism</i>	134
9.4.2	<i>Explore the effects of 'trying too hard'</i>	135
9.4.3	<i>Challenge perfectionistic belief</i>	136
9.4.4	<i>Identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies</i>	137
CHAPTER 10: Workshop Five		140
10.1	Workshop Five: Purpose	140
10.2	A description of workshop five	141
10.3	Plan for workshop five.....	147
10.4	To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?	147
10.4.1	<i>Explore concept of 'shared control'</i>	148
10.4.2	<i>Challenge perfectionistic belief</i>	149
10.4.3	<i>Identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies</i>	151
CHAPTER 11: Workshop Six		154
11.1	Workshop Six: Purpose.....	154
11.2	A description of workshop six.....	155
11.3	Plan for workshop six	161
11.4	To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?	161
11.4.1	<i>Retake Burns Perfectionism Scale and discuss</i>	161
11.4.2	<i>Provide an integrated summary of the programme</i>	164
11.5	Follow-up interview with Storm and Amber.....	167
11.5.1	<i>Transcript of interview with Storm and Amber</i>	168
CHAPTER 12: Key issues arising from the case study ...		172
12.1	Issues related to the nature of perfectionism.....	172
12.1.1	<i>Defining perfectionism</i>	172
12.1.2	<i>The role of Kirk's Change Model in the programme</i>	175
12.1.3	<i>Suitability of level of intervention</i>	176
12.2	Issues related to specific techniques used in the programme.....	179
12.2.1	<i>Use of the Burns Perfectionism Scale</i>	180
12.2.2	<i>Use of the Sustainable Work (PLE) Model</i>	183
12.2.3	<i>Use of Improvisational Drama</i>	184
12.2.4	<i>Use of a group intervention including non-perfectionists</i>	186
12.3	Ideas for future interventions and research.....	187

REFERENCES	191
APPENDIX A ETHICS APPLICATION.....	199
APPENDIX B THE BURNS PERFECTIONISM SCALE.....	210
APPENDIX C WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WORKSHOP ONE.....	212
APPENDIX D RAW DATA FROM WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE	214
APPENDIX E INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPROVISATIONAL GAMES.....	219
APPENDIX F 'QUICK QUIZ'	223
APPENDIX G PLEASURE-PREDICTING SHEET	226
APPENDIX H GALLWEY'S 'SUSTAINABLE WORK' MODEL.....	228
APPENDIX I 'LOWERING STANDARDS' EXPERIMENT	231
APPENDIX J TRANSCRIPT OF WORKSHOP ONE CONVERSATION ...	234
APPENDIX K TRANSCRIPT OF WORKSHOP FIVE CONVERSATION ...	247
APPENDIX L TRANSCRIPT OF WORKSHOP SIX CONVERSATION.....	256
APPENDIX M PROGRAMME EVALUATION QUESTIONS.....	268
APPENDIX N ARTICLE : 'RETHINKING GRADES FOR SUSTAINABLE LEARNING	272
APPENDIX O ARTICLE: 'REFRAMING THE PERFECTIONIST'S CATCH-22 DILEMMA: A SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH'	281

List of Tables

6.0	Attendance at programme workshops.....	70
6.1	Workshop One Plan	75
6.2	Themes from responses to the question “What does success mean to me?”	77
6.3	Themes from responses to the question “How will I know if I am successful?”	78
6.4	Themes from responses to the question “What would change for me if I stopped getting good grades?”	79
6.5	Themes from responses to the question “What does it mean to be a perfectionist?”	80
6.6	Themes from responses to the question “What do I mean by ‘perfect’?”	81
6.7	Themes from responses to the question “Does perfectionism help or hinder my progress?”	82
6.8	Scores for each participant on the Burns Perfectionism Scale.....	97
7.1	Girls’ cost-benefit analysis of perfectionism.....	102
7.2	Workshop Two Plan.....	105
7.3	Scores for each participant on the Quick Quiz (Adderholdt and Goldberg, 1999)	114
8.1	Workshop Three Plan	121
9.1	Workshop Four Plan	134
10.1	Workshop Five Plan	147
11.1	Workshop Six Plan	161
11.2	Two sets of scores for each participant on the Burns Perfectionism Scale	163
12.1	Characteristics of ‘fledgling perfectionists’	179

List of Figures

2.1	Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent	19
4.1	The dynamics of perfectionism: A systems view	50
4.2	'Shifting the burden' archetype applied to perfectionism.....	53
4.3	The Cycle of Dissipative Structures (Kirk, 2000).....	56

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.

CHAPTER 1: *Introduction*

"To be a perfectionist is like you're always unhappy with what you've got 'cos nothing can be perfect and you're always striving for better."

-Amber (pseudonym)

Many have witnessed the debilitating effects of perfectionism. You may have personally experienced the frustration of being unable to produce flawless work. Or perhaps you have seen an exceptionally bright young woman withdrawing from life, refusing to take risks for fear she may not meet her impossibly high standards. Perfectionism in young women is considered a particular problem and a specific 'perfection complex' has been identified in relation to gifted females. Research has linked perfectionism in young women to anorexia and associated disorders (Halmi, 2000, Shafran, 2001). Perfectionism has proven to be a thief, stealing the joy young people should be experiencing from their lives and their achievements.

Quite properly, Kerr (1997) has challenged educators and researchers to do whatever is necessary to help gifted young women reclaim optimal experience and fully engage in life. This research proposal is the basis for work that will explore the nature of perfectionism and ways that adolescent females can be helped to counter its potentially tragic dynamics.

1.1 Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of this study is to develop a Cognitive Behaviour and Improvisational Drama programme and explore and describe its effects on a group of gifted adolescent females with perfectionistic tendencies. For this

reason, the female pronoun will be used in this report when referring to perfectionists, although the trait appears in both males and females.

The following objectives will form the structure for the investigation:

- To develop and implement a group intervention programme that combines cognitive, behavioural and affective approaches (Greenspon, 1999.)
- To observe and describe the effects of the programme on a group of gifted adolescents females with perfectionistic tendencies.
- To determine to what extent these students can be helped to overcome destructive perfectionistic attitudes and behaviour by reframing perfectionism.
- To present ideas for structured group interventions appropriate for use in schools.

1.2 Organisation of thesis

The thesis consists of twelve chapters which are organised in the following way. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature from the field of perfectionism and giftedness. In this chapter, definitions are established and research directions are articulated. Chapter 3 discusses the rationale behind the methodological decisions made in the study. The research imperative for an intervention study rather than more measurement-based research is discussed and supported. The study involved both the development and the delivery of an intervention programme and Chapter 4 describes the conceptual models upon which the intervention was developed. Included in the models is a systems diagram providing a possible explanation of the dynamics by which perfectionism is be maintained. Such a systems view of perfectionism

highlights potential intervention points and provides the basis for the current intervention. Chapter 5 details the design and content of the intervention programme, focussing on the use of Improvisational Drama, the Pleasure-Predicting Sheet, and the Sustainable Work Model. Chapters six through eleven present the experience of the six workshops predominantly through narrative, thematic analysis and anecdote. Each of these six chapters begins by establishing goals for the workshop, followed by a narrative description of the session, then an assessment of the extent to which workshop goals were met. Chapter eleven concludes with a follow up interview with two girls from the study to discuss their experience and evaluate the programme. Chapter twelve considers key issues arising from the case study in relation to the study group, the techniques used in the programme, limitations of the research and ideas for future study.

A visual summary of thesis structure:

<i>Introduction</i>	Chapter One
<i>Background</i>	
<i>Literature Review</i>	Chapter Two
<i>Methodology</i>	Chapter Three
<i>Designing the intervention</i>	
<i>Models</i>	Chapter Four
<i>Details</i>	Chapter Five
<i>The intervention</i>	
<i>A case study</i>	Chapters Six – Eleven
<i>Issues Arising</i>	Chapter Twelve

CHAPTER 2: *A Review of the Literature*

This chapter will place the current study within the historical context of research into perfectionism. In particular, key concepts of perfectionism and giftedness will be defined, their assessment measures outlined and the link between them explored. A summary of research on the impact of perfectionism will be presented and a research focus for the study established.

2.1 Perfectionism

The following section clarifies key issues relating to the research subject of perfectionism. Those issues are how perfectionism is defined, measured and maintained.

2.1.1 *Defining Perfectionism*

The nature of perfectionism is poorly understood and no formally agreed upon definition exists within the literature. In this chapter a range of definitions are discussed before making a choice of definition for the purpose of this study.

General use definitions of perfectionism from several dictionaries reveal the following: “an extreme or excessive striving for perfection, as in one’s work” (Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary 1988, p. 873); “a predilection for setting extremely high standards and being displeased with anything less” (Webster’s II New College Dictionary, 1995, p.816). A perfectionist is defined as “someone who is very careful about small details and is not satisfied unless something is perfect” (Collins Modern English Dictionary, 1974, p.379), and “one who aims at perfection in his work (freq derogatory)” (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1974). Merriam-Webster’s Medical Desk Dictionary defines perfectionism as “a disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable; *especially*: the setting of unrealistically demanding goals

accompanied by a disposition to regard failure to achieve them as unacceptable and a sign of personal worthlessness”.

Setting of high personal standards and dissatisfaction with anything less than perfect performance are common themes in the above definitions, and these characteristics are consistent with subsequent research and attempts to develop measures of perfectionism. Hints of a dysfunctional nature are evident in the phrase ‘excessive striving’, and acknowledgement of a negative social impact is seen in the addendum of ‘freq derogatory’ to the Concise Oxford definition.

Hollender (1978) was one of the first education researchers to define perfectionism, and he considered it to be “the practice of demanding of oneself or others a higher quality of performance than is required by the situation” (p. 384). The standards of the perfectionist are beyond reach or reason, yet the perfectionist measures his or her self-worth entirely in terms of performance and achievement of those unreachable standards. Since perfect performance is impossible to attain, the opportunities for perfectionists to feel good about themselves are severely reduced. Other researchers (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein & Mosher, 1991) have linked perfectionism with self-criticism and have suggested that this not only creates a greater vulnerability to failure, but can interfere with self-actualisation.

Hamacheck (1978) made a distinction between two types of perfectionism – the normal and the neurotic. He described normal perfectionists as “those who derive a very real sense of pleasure from the labours of a painstaking effort and who feel free to be less precise as the situation permits” (p. 27). By contrast, Hamacheck claimed that the efforts of neurotic perfectionists “never seem good enough ... they are unable to feel satisfaction because in their own eyes they never seem to do things good enough to warrant that feeling” (p.27).

A number of more recent studies have continued with the theme that there is a 'normal' and a 'neurotic' form of perfectionism. Orange (1997) contrasted a positive perfectionism that enables a student to strive for excellence with a negative perfectionism, characterised by neurotic, obsessive-compulsive behaviour. This distinction is depicted in her observation that normal perfectionists "allow themselves to fail and be imperfect" (p. 39).

Parker and his associates (Parker, 1997; Parker & Adkins, 1995), cited in Greenspon, (2000) concluded that studies over a two-year period consistently supported a distinction between healthy and unhealthy perfectionistic types. The writings of Adler and Maslow, they suggest, support a theory that perfectionism is a fundamental characteristic of healthy people. In particular, they referred to Maslow's concept of the full use and exploitation of talents, capabilities and potentialities in the pursuit of self-actualisation. Perfectionism, they claim, can operate in the service of self-actualisation.

Silverman (1999) suggested that there are positive as well as negative aspects of perfectionism, depending on how it is channelled. At its best, she maintained, perfectionism can become a catalyst for self-actualisation and growth. Schuler (2000) studied perfectionism and various personality characteristics in gifted adolescents and described her findings as supporting the healthy/dysfunctional dichotomy. Healthy perfectionists, she reported, "displayed self-acceptance of mistakes", while dysfunctional perfectionists "lived in a state of anxiety about making errors ... questioned their own judgments...exhibited a constant need for approval." (p. 193).

These contributions, which frame perfectionism as potentially positive, create a paradox. While a number of researchers suggest there is a healthy form of perfectionism when it is channelled appropriately, common use definitions hint at primarily negative impacts and are supported by clinical and anecdotal data. In fact, many individuals who describe themselves as

perfectionistic do not see this as a positive trait in themselves; rather, they depict perfectionism as a burden and as the painful price they must pay for success (Pacht, 1984; Greenspon, 2000). The pressure to do all things to the superlative degree is highlighted in the following anecdote: Albert Einstein, in response to the question, "If you had your life to do over, what one thing would be the most important to you to change?" stated his wish as: "Simply to be average in everything I did." (Delisle, 1992, p. 97).

According to some researchers (Burns, 1980; Pacht, 1984; Greenspon, 2000), the belief in a dichotomy between normal and dysfunctional perfectionism arises out of confusion between perfectionism and a healthy pursuit of excellence. Those who strive for excellence have a strong desire to do well, to master a task, to know as much as possible or to be the best they can be. These people are motivated by a desire to succeed and they take pleasure in their accomplishments. On the other hand, perfectionism is "less about a desire for improvement than about fear of failure" (Hamachek, 1978, p. 29). Greenspon (2000) pointed out that a fear of failure is never mentioned in Hamachek's "normal perfectionists". It may be that this group is more appropriately labelled 'healthy pursuers of excellence'. Even Hamachek pointed to the similarity of normal perfectionism to "skilled artists or careful workers or masters of their crafts" (p.27).

An important distinction between efforts of true masters of their craft and those of perfectionists is that the striving of the first group brings them personal satisfaction (Missildine, 1963 cited in Greenspon, 2000). When perfectionists do something successfully, they are seldom able to savour the fruits of their accomplishments. Yesterday's success has no meaning in the lexicon of the perfectionist (Pacht, 1984). Adderholdt and Goldberg, (1999) refer to this minimisation of achievement as 'telescopic thinking', where the perfectionist seemingly views successes through the 'minifying' end of a telescope, which makes them appear minute and insignificant.

The occasional success of perfectionists in meeting their stringent standards has two consequences (Burns, 1980; Shafran, Cooper, & Fairburn, 2002a). First, it acts as an intermittent reinforcer of the perfectionistic striving toward those standards, and secondly, the standards are immediately re-appraised as being too low. Such re-setting of standards increases the likelihood that the person will experience failure and thus their self-criticism will be maintained (Shafran et al, 2002a). These processes are consistently negative or dysfunctional in their effect on the individual, even when they are 'channelled' toward useful outcomes.

If healthy pursuit of excellence is *not* perfectionism, statements by researchers that link perfectionism with achievement and self-actualisation need to be reframed. For example, the works of Adler and Maslow have been used to support the idea of positive perfectionism, yet their work can also be understood as lending support to the opposite view. Greenspon, (2000, p. 204) presents Adler's view that "... striving for perfection is healthy when it includes a social concern for others and the maximizing of one's abilities". Greenspon (2000) explains that this 'striving for perfection' should be understood more as working toward completion or wholeness, and oneness with humanity, not that of perfect performance of a task. In fact, Adler was clear about the fact that the exaggerated goal of self-enhancement along with personal superiority over others is part of the neurotic disposition (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, cited in Greenspon, 2000). Adler's original terms, *Überlegenheit* and *Überwindung*, signify preponderance and are embodied also in the Judeo-Christian concept of God as perfection, and of humans as striving toward that goal in imitation of their deity.

Maslow (1968), cited in Greenspon (2000, p. 205), defined self-actualisation as "acceptance and expression of the inner core or self, i.e., actualisation of these latent capacities and potentialities, 'full functioning'..." He describes a full or complete development of a person's potential rather than a drive for

perfection. In fact, Maslow acknowledged that it is through failure, not through perfect performance, that we learn about our strengths and our limits. Grant and Piechowski (1999) objected to the equating of self-actualisation with the self-centered pursuit of individual fulfilment. They claim that such emphasis on achievement and success, which fails to include social responsibility and a contribution to the lives of others, will push our gifted students away from self-actualisation.

Greenspon (2000) suggests that since much research on perfectionism has been conducted by individuals involved in meeting the needs of gifted children, perhaps the concept of healthy perfectionism is part of a larger, entirely laudable attempt to avoid pathologizing giftedness. Whatever the motives, he argues that "healthy perfectionism" is a misnomer and is in fact oxymoronic. In psychological terms, perfectionism refers to the organising principle that unless one is perfect, one is worthless as a person (Greenspon, 1999). Living according to this principle means that perfectionists' self esteem is contingent on their attainment of perfection, which is an unreasonable and self-destructive expectation.

Greenspon's view of perfectionism as a debilitating cognitive style is supported by Pacht's (1984) earlier work where the term 'perfectionism' is used only when describing a kind of psychopathology. Burns' (1980) definition of perfectionists is consistent with this view:

... perfectionists ... are those whose standards are high beyond reach or reason, people who strain compulsively and unremittingly toward impossible goals and who measure their own worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishment. For these people, the drive to excel can only be self-defeating (p.34).

As a group, says Pacht (1984), perfectionists have established a 'no-win scenario'. Their goals are set so unrealistically high that they cannot possibly succeed. They are constantly frustrated by their need to achieve and their failure to do so.

When attempting to understand and treat perfectionist patients, Shafran et al (2002a) maintained it is unhelpful to confuse the functional pursuit of excellence with dysfunctional perfectionism seen in clinical samples. Rather, they have proposed restricting the construct to phenomena of clinical relevance. When perfectionism results in the pursuit of high standards despite significant adverse consequences, such as associated psychological disorders, it has, according to Shafran et al (2002a), become clinically significant. Adverse consequences may be "emotional (e.g. depression), social (e.g. social isolation), physical (e.g. insomnia), cognitive (e.g. impaired concentration) or behavioural (e.g. repeated checking of work, repeated redoing of work, excessive time taken to complete tasks)" (p.778).

Consequently, Shafran et al (2002a) have proposed a new definition of clinical perfectionism with implications for research and treatment, and analysis of this definition and its clinical utility is currently underway. The definition suggests that

... the defining feature of clinically significant perfectionism is the overdependence of self-evaluation on the determined pursuit (and achievement) of self-imposed personally demanding standards of performance in at least one salient domain, despite the occurrence of adverse consequences (p. 773).

An interesting comparison can be made between this recent contribution to the field of perfectionism research and the earlier definition by Hollender (1978). Both stress the inappropriately high standards set by the perfectionist,

and the relentless pursuit of those unjustifiable standards in the face of adverse consequences.

Some clarification needs to be made regarding the definition of perfectionism to be used in this study. Relevant to this clarification is the developmental nature of perfectionism. It is probable that perfectionism begins as primarily positive and rewarding (as perceived by the perfectionist) with apparently minor negative consequences. Over time and given the 'right' conditions, the pursuit of perfection becomes excessive with negative and destructive consequences overwhelming any positive outcome (Shafran and Mansell, 2001). For example, when circumstances change, a previously accessible standard may become unattainable. This may happen when a student moves from high school to university and struggles to maintain a pattern of straight 'A' grades. Persisting with perfectionistic expectations and behaviour may be unrealistic and may have negative consequences such as exhaustion and repeated exposure to failure.

Rather than target perfectionists who have progressed to clinically significant manifestations of the disorder, it would seem useful to work with individuals for whom the condition has not become pathological and who have not acquired associated disorders. For this reason, the purely clinical definition provided by Shafran (2002a), will be altered slightly for the purposes of this study. Because the study deals with pre-clinical perfectionistic behaviour the nature of the "adverse consequences" mentioned by Shafran may be apparently minor. Despite this, the perfectionist and those with whom she is socially connected will be aware that adverse consequences exist. The definition used in the study, therefore, is:

Perfectionism is the overdependence of self-evaluation on the determined pursuit (and achievement) of self-imposed personally demanding standards of performance in at least one salient domain, despite the occurrence of

adverse consequences. Adverse consequences can range in magnitude, and may be perceived by the perfectionist and others as less significant than positive outcomes. Perfectionism is also a characteristic that varies along a continuum.

Reference to a continuum allows for the developmental nature of perfectionism, which may begin as predominantly beneficial but can progress to a dysfunction given the 'right' conditions.

2.1.2 Core processes in perfectionism

The development and maintenance of perfectionistic behaviour is based on a network of cognitions that include expectations, interpretations of events and evaluations of oneself and others. Burns (1980), Pacht (1984) and more recently, Adderholt and Goldberg (1999), have enumerated several illogical and distorted thinking patterns that contribute to the emotional turmoil and impaired productivity of the perfectionist. One of the most common mental distortions is all-or-nothing thinking whereby experience is evaluated in a dichotomous manner as all-black or all-white; intermediate shades of grey do not seem to exist (Burns, 1980). Barrow and Moore (1983) refer to this kind of thinking as 'saint or sinner polarity' and Pacht (1984) uses the descriptive label, the 'God/scum phenomenon' to depict the perfectionist's either/or thinking pattern. This kind of thinking leads a perfectionist who is a straight-A student to consider one B grade or a second place as a total failure. As a result, the perfectionist may experience a roller-coaster effect on their mood and feelings of self-worth.

Perfectionists also "tend to jump to the dogmatic conclusion that a negative event will be repeated endlessly" (Burns, 1980, p.38). This overgeneralisation causes perfectionists to doubt their competence and to perceive themselves as being very likely to fail.

A third distortion is the tyranny of “should” statements (p. 38). When perfectionists fall short of a goal they find it difficult to treat themselves with compassion and self-acceptance. Instead they harangue themselves with ‘shoulds’ such as: should have done it differently, should have studied harder, should have been kinder, etc. Even when perfectionists achieve their goals, they are unable to relish success, since they have only done what was expected (Weisinger & Lobsenz, 1981, p.237, quoted in Pacht, 1984).

Perfectionism has been linked by some researchers to various mental disorders, such as, depression, suicidality, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders and Type A coronary-prone behaviour (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Pacht, 1984; Burns, 1980). Related to these pathologies is the perfectionist’s set of beliefs that acceptance and love is only possible through perfect performance (Greenspon, 2000). One’s worthiness in the eyes of others becomes dependent on being as close to perfect as possible.

Because perfectionists believe that acceptance is conditional on perfect performance, they fear new challenges and live in a state of constant anxiety about making mistakes (Burns, 1980). For perfectionists, a mistake is not simply a mistake; it is evidence of a character flaw. So, many perfectionists avoid healthy risks that will help them grow, procrastinating or refusing outright for fear of failure (Adderholt & Goldberg, 1999). For many perfectionists, there is safety in inertia. The negative self-talk runs something like: *“If I never write that story/paint that picture/perform that song, I don’t have to risk rejection or criticism”* (Adderholt & Goldberg, 1999, p. 28). To protect themselves from possible failure, many bright students take less challenging courses to protect their grades, or fail to complete course assignments. Adderholt and Goldberg (1999) refer to “paralysed perfectionism”, which, along with fear of failure, is characteristic of perfectionistic students and contributes to underachievement.

2.1.3 Measuring perfectionism

To assess the impact of this research intervention involves, in part, a before and after measurement of perfectionism in the study group. This section explores the literature relevant to the measurement of perfectionism.

Early efforts to measure perfectionism treated the construct as uni-dimensional (Burns, 1980). The Burns Perfectionism Scale was adapted from the 'success-perfectionism' subscale of the DAS (Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale (Burns, 1999) and included items that explored the relationship between self-evaluation and achievement.

More recently, perfectionism has been considered a multidimensional construct in an attempt to include more social and interpersonal factors in the assessment. Two separate research teams developed what each called a Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) to assess these additional dimensions. These scales were developed by Frost, Marten, Lahart and Rosenblate (1990) and by Hewitt and Flett (1991).

The measure of Frost et al (1990) included two items from the Burns Perfectionism Scale (focussed on 'personal standards' and 'concern over mistakes') and expanded the measure of perfectionism to cover five dimensions: (i) 'Concern over Mistakes' (reacting negatively to mistakes and equating them with failure), (ii) 'Doubts about Actions' (doubting the quality of one's performance), (iii) 'Personal Standards' (setting of very high standards and basing self-evaluation on achievement of those standards), (iv) 'Parental Expectations' (perceiving that one's parents have high expectations), and (v) 'Parental Criticism' (perceiving one's parents as critical and demanding). Stober (1998) in Shafran et al (2001) has suggested that the five scales of Frost's MPS can more usefully be considered as three inter-related factors, 'Concern over mistakes and doubts', 'Parental expectations and criticism,' and 'Personal standards'.

Hewitt and Flett's scale (1991) differentiated three types of perfectionism: 'self-oriented perfectionism' which includes self-imposed excessively high standards and intensive self-scrutiny and criticism, 'other-oriented perfectionism' which involves demanding that others meet unrealistically high standards and 'socially prescribed perfectionism' which is the belief that others have unrealistically high standards for the individual and that meeting these standards is necessary for acceptance and approval.

Shafran et al (2002a) have pointed out that the widespread use of the multidimensional measures has led to the acceptance of perfectionism as a multidimensional construct. Yet, this may be a case of a concept being too easily equated with its method of measurement. The major difficulty with this, according to Shafran et al is that the current measures assess a range of features that may not be true to the classical construct of perfectionism, but rather are associated with or related to perfectionism. They claim that

only 'self-oriented perfectionism', 'personal standards' and some items on the 'concern over mistakes' subscales come close to assessing the construct of perfectionism (p.776).

Shafran et al (2002a) maintain that failure to distinguish between perfectionism and associated features, using a multidimensional approach, has contributed to the lack of progress in theoretical understanding and clinical treatment of perfectionism. They highlight the need for a measure true to the classical concept of perfectionism; one that also takes into consideration clinical observation of perfectionist individuals (2002b).

Given the concerns expressed by Shafran and in keeping with the definition of perfectionism adopted earlier, the Burns Perfectionism Scale has been selected as a measure of perfectionism for this study. Further information on this measure is available in Chapter Three: Methodology.

2.2 Defining Giftedness

As outlined in the research objectives, this intervention will target perfectionism among gifted students. This section discusses what constitutes giftedness.

The struggle for a consistent and relevant definition of perfectionism is evident also in the search for a definition of giftedness. At present there is no single expert or prevailing theory of giftedness on which to rely, rather the field is ambiguous and diverse. Various definitions range from specific, precise, hard data definitions based on percentage scores or IQs to vague, generally-worded concepts emphasising student behaviour or potential ability.

Terman (1947) defined the gifted as the top one per cent of the population in general intellectual ability as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale or comparable instrument. Soon after, educators and psychologists began to question the validity of tests of general intellectual ability and, in particular, their power to identify in a valid and reliable way the children who are gifted. General intelligence tests were criticised as being biased in favour of white middle-class children, of failing to identify gifted children from different cultures, and missing the underachieving but bright child. Renzulli (1998) dismissed the idea that IQ alone is the determinant of giftedness; instead he proposed a tri-factor model of giftedness that highlighted creativity and task commitment as two necessary elements of giftedness in addition to above-average ability. It is the interaction of the three traits that provides the necessary ingredient for creative or productive accomplishment, which he considered to be the true test of giftedness. The import of this model was to define giftedness as a set of overt behaviours rather than inherent traits or potential.

The following definition of giftedness was offered by the United States Office of Education (USOE) in 1981 and was accepted by 34 states as their official definition of giftedness:

Children who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, capacity, or specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities. (Education and Consolidation Act, PL 97-35, Section 582)

Delisle (1992) has enthusiastically supported this definition since it is specific, allows for the identification of children with gifted behaviours as well as gifted traits, and it points to a need for special programming for the gifted. It also categorizes talents into separate, yet related compartments, and in this way reflects the wider context of overall definitions of intelligence.

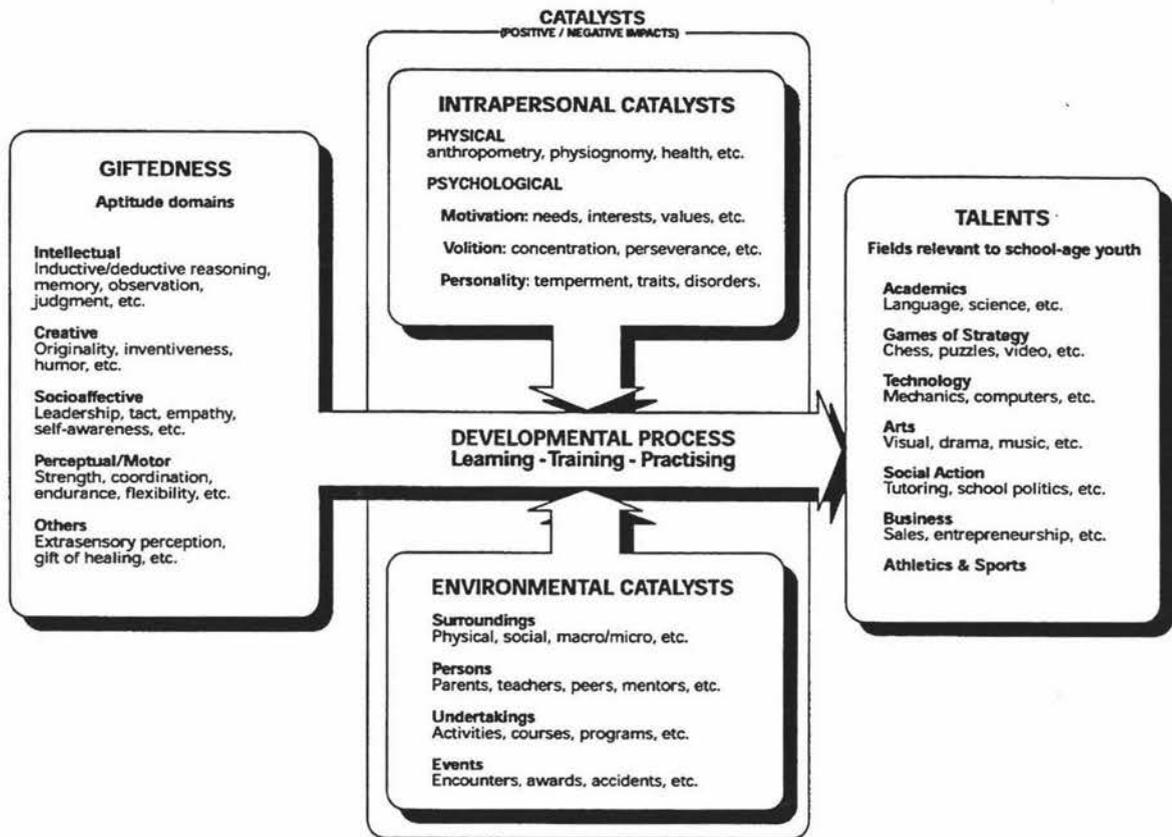
According to Piechowski (1986), gifted persons differ in degree, not kind, from others around them. They have an abundance of the traits that are common in everyone. He labels this condition *overexcitability* and uses words like 'energetic', 'enthusiastic', 'absorbed', 'vivid' and 'emotional', to describe the condition.

The heightened and broadened emotionality of the gifted is also acknowledged by Morelock (1996). She asserts that the contemporary tendency to define giftedness as behaviours, achievements or school placements external to the individual persists, and that this misses the essence of giftedness. In an attempt to define giftedness that penetrates beyond behavioural achievement and that takes psychological and emotional factors into account, Morelock describes the work of the Columbus group (a meeting of theorists, practitioners and parents in Columbus, Ohio):

Giftedness is *asynchronous development* in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm ... The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counselling in order for them to develop optimally. (p.4).

The concept of asynchrony was described by Gowan (1974) as “disparity either between the age of the individual ...and the ... stage he is actually in ...or disparity between the cognitive stage he is in and the affective stage he is in” (p.165). Silverman (1998) noted that asynchronous development of the gifted made them more prone to emotional vulnerability. Greenspon (1999) concurred with Silverman and suggested that emotional vulnerability resides in the sense of organisation and cohesion experienced by the gifted person. The gifted, he claims, are more likely to experience their world as inconsistent or non-cohesive because while they are aware they are different, a perception that is not easily shared by others.

More recently, the work of Gagné (1995) has influenced the field of giftedness. His differentiated model proposes a clear distinction between giftedness and talent. The term giftedness designates the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities in at least one ability domain, to a degree that places a student at least among the top 15% of his or her age peers. By contrast, the term talent designates the superior mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) and knowledge in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places a student within at least the upper 15% of age peers. Gagné suggests that talent progressively emerges from the transformation of aptitudes into well-trained and systematically developed skills. So, this model (Figure 2.1) acknowledges that not all gifted children are achievers; there are many impediments that block or misdirect the development of the gifted child’s ability (e.g. motivation, personality, and environment).



Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT.97)

Figure 2.1 Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent

<http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au/centoff/gifttal/giftGAG.htm>

Three broad categories of definitions have been reviewed here: (1) IQ based approaches; (2) external approaches, based on behavioural outputs or achievements; (3) asynchronous development, focusing on the internal psychological and emotional world of the individual. Many programmes use a combination of these approaches to identify the gifted. The New Zealand Ministry of Education (MOE) Handbook (2000, p. 11) says "there has been a trend away from defining the gifted and talented in terms of a single category (for example, high IQ) towards a multi-category approach, which acknowledges a diverse range of special abilities". In line with this trend, the New Zealand MOE encourages the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of identification. Some of these methods are: teacher, self-, peer and parent nominations; standardised tests of intelligence, achievement and

creativity; teacher-made tests; portfolios and performance-based assessments; rating scales and checklists.

Because this study focuses on perfectionism, a phenomenon that can prevent the gifted from fully expressing their internal capabilities as external achievements, the relevance of Gagne's conceptual model is noted, along with an awareness of asynchronous development as an integral part of giftedness.

2.3 The link between giftedness and perfectionism

Perfectionism has been considered an emotional trait of giftedness since Hollingworth's (1926) seminal research on gifted children. It continues to be included among major characteristics of giftedness (Whitmore, 1980 in Silverman, 1993; Lovecky, 1994, Adderholdt- & Goldberg, 1999).

The New Zealand Association for Gifted Children cite perfectionism as one of the identifying characteristics of a gifted child <http://www.homestead.com/NZAGC/files/identifying.html>. A study by Silverman, Chitwood and Waters (1986) demonstrated that gifted children manifested at least 13 of the 16 characteristics, according to parental assessment.

Orange (1997) discovered that perfectionistic tendencies were displayed by 89% of a high school sample of gifted students. Similarly, Schuler (2000) found that 87.5 percent of gifted adolescents in a rural middle school possessed perfectionistic tendencies, although included in this group were students labelled 'healthy perfectionists'. According to the definition of perfectionism for this study, these students may well have been labelled pursuers of excellence.

Silverman (1993) pointed out that the link between giftedness and perfectionism is inevitable. She claims that perfectionism may arise as a

function of the asynchronous development of the gifted. They will likely set standards for themselves based on their advanced cognitive awareness; standards more in line with their mental peers than their age-mates. It should be noted that the setting of high standards alone does not constitute perfectionism; also present in the perfectionist are harsh, negative self-talk, judgement and a motivation to achieve based on fear of failure. High cognitive abilities enable the gifted to do things to a high degree of excellence, and a sense of omnipotence leads them to believe they can do all things. This can make the child feel duty-bound to do all things perfectly.

Others have suggested a less direct link between perfectionism and giftedness. Roedell (1984) cited perfectionism as a developmental vulnerability of being gifted. Schmitz and Galbraith (1985), linked perfectionism to giftedness through the heightened awareness of quality and the ability of the gifted person to discern the difference between the mediocre and the extraordinary. Once a person can perceive excellence and can sense "how it ought to be done" the desire to achieve that level of excellence may become intense. When this desire exists in tandem with learned fear of failure, perfectionism may result (Kerr, 1994).

Greenspon (2000) cites a study by Parker and Mills (1996) that found no significant differences between gifted and non-gifted populations on measures of perfectionism. Some gifted individuals are perfectionists, Greenspon concludes, and some are not. Many gifted people are capable of doing certain tasks perfectly, however this is not necessarily a sign of perfectionism. The desire to do one's best and to strive for excellence is not *per se* perfectionistic, whereas the desire to be perfect is. Perfectionists are driven by the belief that acceptance as a worthwhile person is conditional on their performance. If, in fact, gifted children are not at greater risk for being perfectionists, this indicates that something more than the ability to do well underlies perfectionism.

2.4 The need to help gifted female perfectionists

Gifted young people have much to offer both themselves and society; however, in addition to the seeming advantages of giftedness, there are many challenges specific to the gifted teen. One of those challenges occurs when a gifted individual is also a perfectionist. When giftedness and perfectionism combine, a high price can be paid at both the personal and societal level. Evidence is mounting that the price paid by those who strive compulsively toward impossible goals includes decreased productivity, underachievement, impaired health, troubled personal relationships and low self-esteem (Burns, 1980; Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein & Mosher, 1991; Rice, Ashby & Slaney, 1998).

The perfectionist is also vulnerable to a number of serious emotional and mood disorders, including depression, obsessive-compulsive illness and eating disorders (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999; Halmi, Sunday, Strober, Kaplan, Woodside, Fichter, Treasure, Berrettini, Kaye, 2000; Pratt, Telch, Labouvie, Wilson & Agras, 2001). There is some evidence that perfectionistic individuals are likely to respond to failure with dramatic losses in self-esteem that can trigger episodes of severe depression along with suicide attempts (Delisle, 1986; Slaby, 1994; Blatt, 1995; Goleman, 1996).

Gifted perfectionistic girls are at particular risk since their asynchronous development and personality traits make them more susceptible to stress (Silverman, 1993). Perfectionism intensifies in adolescence (Kline & Short, 1991); therefore the gifted adolescent girl will be particularly vulnerable to its potential negative effects. Kerr (1994), identified Junior High School (equivalent to NZ Year 9 and 10) as the most vulnerable period for gifted girls. Gilligan (1991) observes that girls are pressed at adolescence to take on images of perfection as the model of the ideal woman; the woman who will be highly valued and everyone will want to be with.

Reis (1987) notes that many bright girls display the "Queen Bee Syndrome", which involves trying to do everything and do it well. This over-involvement by gifted girls is mentioned also by Kerr, (1984) who notes

The major concern I have about gifted girls is the frequency with which they lack focus for all of their activities. Most middle and high schools seem to encourage the blind accumulation of in-school and out-of-school activities as a sign of female popularity and success. Gifted girls often become over-involved, ... they become ill from lack of sleep ... or from the stress resulting from spreading themselves so thin." (p. 248).

Similar patterns of over-involvement are observed in highly productive adult women, who manifest a tendency to achieve highly in all life activities. Reis (1987) says it is often not enough that "they attempt to be outstanding in their work; their perfection complex causes them to strive for a Jane Fonda body, a house that could be on the cover of *Better Homes and Gardens*, and perfect children" (p 84).

These women often wear themselves out trying to do everything well, and yet they are still plagued by guilt that have not given their husbands, children, home, garden, and career enough time and attention. The irony of this perfection complex occurs when women have achieved outstanding success, yet experience what is labelled the "Imposter Syndrome" (Clance, 1985, cited in Reis, 1987) attributing their success to factors other than their own efforts. They live in fear of discovery that they are really unworthy of their success.

Actress Michelle Pfeiffer puts it this way:

I have this nagging fear of failure that I'm going to be found out, that I'm an impostor, that this is the movie they will discover it on.
(<http://talentdevelop.com/imposter>)

Reis (1998) drew a parallel between the 'Impostor Syndrome' and low self-efficacy among women. Those with low self-efficacy judge their behaviour harshly, focus on their feelings of incompetence, avoid new learning experiences, expect their efforts will not produce results, and give up trying to achieve in the face of difficulty. Gilligan (1991) found self-efficacy among young males was maintained during failures. This was not true of females who accepted responsibility for their failure, but not their success. While they attributed their success to luck, they attributed their failure to lack of ability.

Wolf (2001) supported this finding and has described women as being terrified of being imperfect due to fear of being laughed at and criticised. Young men, she says, are taught to take criticism in a more impersonal way and are not held back by the same fear of rejection. Reis (1998) suggests that fear of failure and of criticism leads to a lack of the personal resilience necessary for actualising the full potential of women.

Findings from research on self-concept and achievement by Locksley and Douvan (1980) revealed that girls with high grades were significantly more depressed and had lower self-esteem than boys with high grades. An alarming loss in self-confidence and achievement in girls is documented as they move from childhood to adolescence. These losses are not matched in boys. Silverman (1979) noted that while numbers of gifted children in the population appear to be increasing, the numbers of girls referred for assessment for giftedness is dropping.

Patterns of underachievement also emerge in females after puberty, around high school age (Reis, 1987). This contrasts with male underachievers whose patterns of underachievement span the years from new entrant to high school (Fitzpatrick, 1978). It must be noted that concern is now being expressed in educational circles over increasing underachievement in males, and this will undoubtedly be the subject of future research.

In order to demonstrate relevance and timeliness of the proposed research into alleviating problems that impact adversely on gifted females realising their potential, issues of underachievement, eating disorders and suicide will be considered further.

2.4.1 Perfectionism and underachievement

Davis and Rimm (1994) claim that as many as half of all gifted children in the United States do not perform up to ability in school. They cite studies by Lajoie and Shore (1981) and Whitmore (1980) that suggest between 10 and 20 percent of students who don't graduate are in the gifted range of abilities. New Zealand data is not available for comparison.

Davis and Rimm (1994) define this phenomenon of underachievement as a discrepancy between students' high ability and mediocre or poor school performance. Delisle (1992) cautioned that "discrepancy" definitions, while clean-cut and precise

can be quite limiting; for when underachievement is seen from the vantage point of test scores versus daily performance, it becomes associated exclusively with academic, school-based endeavours. Yet... underachievement... is often more a symptom of another concern... than it is a problem in and of itself (p.116).

Perfectionistic tendencies may cause underachievement, especially in secondary school when work gets more difficult, due to procrastination, fear of failure and related avoidance behaviours (Davis and Rim, 1994). Adderholdt-Elliot (1999) pointed also to the all-or-nothing mindset, paralysed perfectionism and workaholism as other characteristics of perfectionistic students that contribute to underachievement. Such strategies provide a student with a ready excuse for poor performance, a rationale for failure and a defence mechanism against labelling the self as incompetent (even though

the student may feel incompetent). In addition, the student may lower her expectations in order to reduce the risk of failure. Whichever strategy is adopted, the outcome is self-defeating underachievement.

Importantly for this study, which aims to address perfectionism and its contribution to underachievement, these avoidance behaviours are learned and can be modified (Delisle, 1992; Rimm, 1986).

2.4.2 *Perfectionism and eating disorders*

Data from a large international study by Halmi, Sunday, Strober, Kaplan, Woodside, Fichter, Treasure, Berrettini, and Kaye, (2000) suggests that perfectionism is a robust, discriminating characteristic of anorexia nervosa. Of all psychiatric disorders anorexia has the highest death rate. Halmi et al concluded that the extent of perfectionism was directly associated with the severity of the victims' disorder. The compulsion for the perfectionist to do all things perfectly flows over into self-presentation and body image. It is likely that women with perfectionistic tendencies are more inclined to feel shame and dissatisfaction with their bodies when they compare them to the socio-cultural expectations of thinness. Combined with the perfectionist's reluctance to admit to failure and imperfection, the anorexia victim engages in denial and secrecy (Kuehnel, 1998).

Shafran et al (2002a) suggest that anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa "do not simply co-occur with clinical perfectionism but are in many cases the expression of perfectionism in the domain of eating, shape or weight and their control" (p.782). Indeed, perfectionism is viewed as being so integral to eating disorders that one of the most widely used measures of eating disorder psychopathology (the 'Eating Disorder Inventory') includes a subscale on perfectionism (Garner, Olmstead, Polivy, 1983). One compelling reason cited by Shafran et al (2002a) for suggesting that eating disorders may be an expression of perfectionism, is that descriptions of patients with eating

disorders, particularly anorexia nervosa, almost invariably highlight their perfectionistic traits.

For example, people with perfectionism determinedly pursue their standards, despite adverse consequences. This is the case in eating disorders where “patients stubbornly pursue standards of control over eating, weight or shape despite adverse consequences such as being markedly underweight, feeling persistently hungry, being vulnerable to binge eating, and having difficulty eating with others” (p. 782). In addition, dichotomous thinking, which is characteristic of perfectionism, causes the sufferer of an eating disorder to temporarily abandon their stringent rules to engage in binge eating if they break their rules even slightly or if they fail to meet their standards. Shafran et al (2002a) suggest too that eating disorders are particularly intransigent when they are specific expressions of perfectionism.

Current local figures are difficult to ascertain but one Auckland study found that 14% of the 1500 schoolgirls surveyed indicated potential eating disorders (NZ Eating Disorders Service, 2001).

2.4.3 *Perfectionism and teenage suicide*

Goleman (1996) noted several recent studies that indicate that unhealthy perfectionists have a higher suicide risk. Delisle (1990) argued that perfectionism in gifted students is a significant contributor to suicide. He concluded “over time, perfectionistic teens begin to equate personal worth with personal success, so that any defeat is seen as a devastating loss of pride” (p 222). Adderholt and Goldberg (1999) agree that while not all teenage suicides are related to perfectionism, it’s almost certain that some of them are. They cite four characteristics of young people who seem to be more prone to suicide than others; these characteristics are above-average intelligence, high expectations of themselves or others, extremely intense relationships with

others and an inability to accept failure and loss. The group of young people most likely to have all these traits is gifted perfectionist teens.

Goleman, (2001) has identified a higher suicide risk for perfectionists, and Blatt (1995) concluded that the extreme perfectionism of three suicide victims had significantly interfered with their therapeutic response to treatment for depression. The statistics related to teenage suicide both worldwide and nationally give cause for concern.

In a 1996 World Health Organisation comparison of suicide rates in thirteen selected OECD countries, New Zealand's youth suicide rate was the highest. The countries compared were New Zealand, Finland, Australia, Canada, USA, Norway, France, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Japan, UK and Netherlands. NZ Health Information Services report that youth suicides (15 – 24 years) in New Zealand account for around 26 percent of total suicides, despite youth making up only 15 percent of the population. Suicide rates for more recent years (1996 –1999) show no marked increase, however, since suicide is a rare event it is more informative to examine the total pattern of suicide rates over several years. This examination reveals a doubling of youth suicide rates since 1985. According to the American Centers for Disease Control (1996), suicide ranks as the third leading cause of death among fifteen to twenty-four-year olds in the US.

Significant discrepancies exist between male and female youth suicide rates in New Zealand. For every female suicide in New Zealand there are four male suicides. This is a common pattern reported in the suicide statistics for most countries, and yet this needs to be considered alongside the data collected by CDC (Centers for Disease Control) on suicide attempts and suicidal thinking.

Adderholt and Goldberg (1999) report the results of a 1996 survey of American students in grades 9-12 (aged 14 – 17) by CDC. During the twelve months prior to the survey:

- 24.1 percent had thought seriously about attempting suicide
- 17.7 percent had made a specific plan to attempt suicide
- 8.7 percent had attempted suicide
- 2.8 percent had made a suicide attempt which resulted in an injury, poisoning, or overdoses that required medical attention.

The widespread nature of suicidal thinking, planning and execution among teens is evident from these figures. Further, a comparison of female and male responses revealed that females (30.4 percent) were much more likely than males (18.3 percent) to have thought seriously about attempting suicide. Females (21.3 percent) were much more likely than males (14.4 percent) to have made a specific plan to attempt suicide, and females (11.9 percent) were much more likely than males (5.6 percent) to have actually attempted suicide.

So, while more males than females die from their suicide attempts, more females than males think about suicide, make specific suicide plans and then carry out actual suicide attempts. There are a number of theories for this pattern, for example, males tend to be more reluctant to seek help for emotional problems, and they tend to use more lethal methods of suicide. Slaby (1994) says the gender anomaly in the suicide statistics is because “boys are much more successful in completing suicide than girls. In 55 percent of cases (in the U.S.A.), boys use a gun” (p 98). For whatever reason, females are less successful at killing themselves even though they engage in suicidal thinking much more frequently than do males.

There are many reasons why young people kill themselves, and perfectionism seems to be among them. Slaby (1994) notes of one teen suicide:

The perfectionism John aspired to is a common thread among suicidal adolescents. They must be “all” or they are nothing. This demanding, uncompromising attitude becomes a set-up for their own perceived failure, depression, and sense of hopelessness. Hopelessness, in turn, can lead to suicidal thoughts, and suicidal thoughts may yield to suicide attempts (p 50).

Youth suicide in New Zealand was linked to perfectionist sporting ideals by a visiting British health advisor whose comments were reported in the *Sunday Star Times* newspaper. Peter Wilson, director of YoungMinds UK, a charity providing mental health services to youth, is reported as being “dumbstruck” at New Zealand’s high youth suicide rate. He speculates about a possible link with the incredibly high Kiwi sporting ideals valued in New Zealand society. In particular, he draws attention to a “a very strong kind of machismo” with a heavy emphasis on health, beauty, fitness, surfing, cricket and football. “Young people” he said “were troubled by the discrepancy between who they were and the type of adult they felt their society valued”.

Support for his view comes from another newspaper article in *The Dominion* of August 24, 2001, which is headed “It’s got to be ... perfect”. The article quotes ex-All Black captain, Taine Randell as saying that the All Blacks would have to do everything *perfectly* if they were to win their next test match against South Africa.” The nation-wide reaction to the All Blacks unexpected loss of the 1999 Rugby World Cup exemplified this intolerance for less than perfect sporting outcomes. Riley (2000) says the reaction at home was “phenomenal, with headlines reading that New Zealand has lost its sense of identity, morale was down, and a change of government was inevitable – the feel good feeling was gone” (p 47). Plato once said “What is valued in one’s country is what will be cultivated”, so the challenge is to identify unhealthy striving for perfection in our children.

In discussing the findings of a United Nations survey indicating that New Zealand has the highest suicide rate in the industrialised world, Shenon (1995) reports that the higher suicide rate among young men in particular, in New Zealand, is related to exaggerated standards of masculinity that many cannot hope to meet.

2.4.4 Perfectionism and the 'model student'

Schuler (2000) alerts researchers and educators to a particular difficulty in meeting the needs of gifted perfectionists at school. In her study of perfectionistic gifted adolescents at a rural middle school, she found almost all of the teachers were unable to identify any of the students who were suffering detrimental effects from their perfectionism. One reason, she posits, may be that the perfectionistic gifted adolescents were often model students who worked diligently not to reveal any flaws. Their overt perfectionistic attitudes and behaviours may have been viewed as good school adjustment. Schuler (2000) remarked: "when gifted adolescents who are 'model students' act on their distress through eating disorders, mutilation, committing suicide or murder, educators and peers are usually stunned." (p.194)

Given the high incidence of perfectionism among gifted and talented students, along with the particular challenges associated with adolescent females, the present research focuses on gifted adolescent girls. Perfectionism is defined for the study as a debilitating set of beliefs that may not manifest their deleterious effect until the perfectionist is confronted with an increasingly challenging environment.

CHAPTER 3: *Methodology*

3.1 The need for an intervention study

While various writers have called for more research on perfectionism, Reis (1987) and Shafran (2002) encourage future research efforts to focus on treatments rather than on diagnostic endeavours. They point to the very few articles in academic journals that document interventions in the area of perfectionism.

Why does this need exist and what might prevent researchers from addressing this gap in the literature? Answering these questions will provide context for the present study. Shakeshaft, Bowman, and Sanson-Fisher (1997) note the tendency of academic communities to establish preferences for certain types of research and to neglect others. Yet, the espoused purpose of academic journals is to enable a group of loosely-connected researchers to act as a community. That is, knowledge is shared so that researchers can build on each other's work to address issues of mutual concern.

If researchers in a particular field were acting effectively as a community, we would expect to see the progressive emergence in the literature of four different types of study. Shakeshaft et al define these as Measurement, Description, Intervention and Dissemination studies. Measurement studies are those that explore the nature of a field of interest. It would include theoretical work designed to generate models of the field, along with qualitative studies designed to deepen general understanding of the field. Ultimately, these studies should yield instruments that enable the field to be measured.

Once measurement instruments have been developed, they can be used in Descriptive studies. That is, the instruments enable researchers to describe the true state of the field. They may identify areas of greatest concern, or anomalies that may exist in the field: for instance, what groups are affected more or less than might be expected? Ultimately, Descriptive studies should point out where intervention is most needed, and perhaps give some clues as to what the nature of an intervention might be.

Intervention studies aim to establish what can be done to bring about improvement in the field. While researchers might use intuitive processes in designing their intervention, they are ultimately tested using the measurement instruments established previously. Over time researchers will build a body of knowledge regarding what does and does not work in bringing about desirable change.

While researchers may have access to knowledge generated by interventions, ultimately this knowledge needs to be passed to those in the field who are required to use it. Who these users are will depend on the nature of the intervention. Dissemination studies are those designed to establish how knowledge can be best delivered to where it is needed.

Consider how these stages might apply in the field of perfectionism. Initial studies will discuss the nature of the phenomenon and how it can be measured. Descriptive studies will use accepted measurement instruments to determine who is affected by perfectionism: does it occur amongst particular groups, at certain ages or in certain cultures? These questions might establish, for example, that perfectionism is particularly prevalent and damaging amongst teenage females in New Zealand and twenty-year-old males in Scandinavia. Different interventions might be needed in each instance. An intervention with teenage females may establish that they respond best to a prescribed set of actions taken by teachers and parents. A Dissemination

study might explore the relative effectiveness of efforts taken to persuade parents and teachers to take up these actions.

The nature of research means that studies will naturally raise issues or questions that relate to earlier stages. A descriptive study might indicate that changes are needed to the measurement instrument. An intervention study may do the same. For a variety of reasons, articles representing the different stages of research may appear at various times.

This discussion has outlined what we might expect to find within a balanced research community. What is actually in the literature is quite different. For example, Shakeshaft et al (1997) found that in their field of interest - behavioural medicine - researchers consistently favoured descriptive studies, even when there had been little previous work done in establishing valid measurement instruments acceptable to the research community. Ramsey (2002), on the other hand, found an absence of descriptive studies in the field of organisational learning; rather, there was a plethora of model-building (measurement) research along with interventions.

The imbalanced distribution of research across these stages can result from factors such as: accepted research methods; funding; requirements of journals; researcher training and access to research subjects. What is the case within the field of perfectionism?

As discussed in the literature review, much research in perfectionism has focused on refining the instruments used to diagnose and measure the phenomenon. Distinctions have been made between healthy and unhealthy, or normal and dysfunctional perfectionism; and multi-dimensional definitions have superseded uni-dimensional ones, only to raise questions about whether the essential core construct of perfectionism has been lost in the process. In addition, many descriptive studies have explored the

prevalence of perfectionism among various groups, and have established links between perfectionism and emotional disorders. One might expect to find a body of work on interventions developing close behind. That has not been the case. Instead, it seems researchers have focussed on the measurement stage, challenging accepted measures and undertaking new descriptive studies with re-configured instruments.

Shafran and Mansell (2001) report finding only one intervention study on perfectionism, that by Ferguson and Rodway (1994). When that study was reviewed it was notable that the article focussed on reporting changes on various measures resulting from the intervention, with very little detail of the intervention itself. As a consequence of reading the article, another researcher would be able to replicate the evaluation of the intervention, but not replicate the intervention itself.

This review of research activity on perfectionism has highlighted the need to move to intervention studies. This study describes a programme that starts to address the need for useful intervention among teenage perfectionists. A summary of the research process follows:



3.2 Use of Case Study

The purpose of this research is to describe the effect of an intervention on a group of gifted adolescents. For this reason an evaluative case study approach was adopted. Kenny and Grotelueschen (1980) reason that “case study can be an important approach when the future of a program is contingent upon an evaluation being performed and there are no reasonable indicators of programmatic success which can be formulated in terms of behavioural objectives or individual differences” (p. 5). In addition, case study is appropriate when the objective of the evaluation is to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of a programme.

Bell (1987) defines case study as a “family of research methods focussing on inquiry around an instance” (p. 6). The ‘instance’ in this research study is the teaching intervention of the ‘Life-long Learning Programme’. The programme focused on sustainable learning principles within the context of improvisational drama sessions. Such focussed consideration of a single practical instance allows for in-depth study within a limited time frame.

Case study approach answers the question “what is going on here?” The aim of the proposed research is to describe and to illuminate the unique experience of those involved in the intervention. The emphasis is on meaning and interpretation rather than generalisability. Research is often evaluated in terms of its ability to generalise to universal principles. Supporters of case study argue that generalisation is not always the preferred or achievable research outcome, regardless of research design. Bassey takes the view that

An important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision making to that described in the case study. The relatibility of a case study is more important than its generalisability (1981, p. 85) .

This case study will have achieved a valid outcome if it produces useful insight for those concerned. In particular, the intervention needs to be described and interpreted in a way that is useful for those stakeholders involved in the research. Case Study has been referred to as the common language approach to evaluation and its ordinary ways of making sense and communicating that meaning to interested parties. This case study will be useful for the participants if it indicates ways they can make their learning sustainable; it will be useful to the researcher if it generates lessons that can be applied in future interventions; and useful to the school if it enables quality decisions to be made regarding direction and support for future interventions.

The case study model is based on a view of reality as something individuals construct as they bring their personal histories to bear on the world and on other people. It is therefore, necessarily a subjective construct, which is not accessible to objective, quantifiable inquiry. In addition, there are few agreed upon ground rules for analysis of qualitative data. Patton (1990) notes

There are no formulas for determining significance. There are no ways of perfectly replicating the researcher's thought processes. There are no straightforward tests for reliability and validity. In short, there are no absolute rules except to do the very best with your intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of your study (p. 372).

While the students will be given a pre-test before the intervention and a post-test at the completion of the programme, the effectiveness or otherwise of the programme will not be determined by these measures. The pre-test will give an indication of which girls demonstrate perfectionistic tendencies from the outset but this evaluation will be held lightly until corroborative data is gathered from activities and observation during the workshops.

Parlett and Hamilton (1972) suggest that the natural science model falls seriously short of capturing the multiple and unpredictable effects of any intervention on a complex social system. Innovative programmes, they claim, cannot be separated from the social-psychological and material environment in which students and teachers/researchers work together. Programmes are not self-contained and independent systems, but rather they set off a chain of repercussions throughout the 'learning milieu'. The case study method aims to capture these multiple effects and multiple perspectives.

Case study offers further benefits for this particular research in that it relates directly to the real world of practising teachers and is able to generate fine-grained and rich descriptions of experience. The qualitative researcher usually emphasizes the quality of activities and processes, portraying them in narrative description. Parlett and Hamilton (1972) sound a cautionary note regarding unrealistic expectations of the case study approach: "This approach does not cure all ills ... indeed ... the illuminative evaluator (qualitative researcher) is likely to increase rather than lessen the sense of uncertainty in education." (p. 22). The open-ended nature of case study inquiry often means that more questions are raised than are answered.

This relates to one of the key aims of case study, which is to learn from participants in the research. In order to do this a flexible approach is required, along with a willingness to work with unpredictable and emergent processes. The researcher makes a flexible list of questions, progressively redefines issues, and seizes opportunities to learn the unexpected (Stake, 1995). This flexibility and readiness to respond in the moment are seen as critical to good teaching practice and to effective interpersonal interaction, both of which constitute the essence of this intervention programme. Parlett and Hamilton (1972) refer to the flexibility of the qualitative researcher as *progressive focusing*. They speak of three stages through which investigators move: observation, renewed inquiry, and explanation:

Obviously, the three stages overlap and functionally interrelate... The course of the study cannot be charted in advance... researchers systematically reduce the breadth of their enquiry to give more concentrated attention to the emergent issues (p.148).

As a result of this spontaneity and constant change, the data produced from case study research can be vast and unfocused. Wolcott (1990) writes in his manual "the critical task in qualitative research is not to accumulate all the data you can, but to "can" (i.e., get rid of) most of the data you accumulate.... We have to be careful not to get buried by avalanches of our own making" (p.35).

3.3 Collection of Data

"Qualitative study" says Stake (1995) "capitalizes on ordinary ways of getting acquainted with things" (p.49). And that acquaintance with the case begins with the earliest of observations, even before commitment to do the study is gained. Those 'ordinary ways' include observation, interviews, focus groups and the use of textual material (Bouma, 1996). All of these were chosen as data collection techniques in the present study. It is usual with case study design to obtain data from multiple sources in order to provide a more comprehensive perspective and to validate and cross-check findings.

Observation during and around the 6 workshops provided a record of events and a description for further analysis. Key events and categories were identified as a focus of the researcher's attention and revealing moments, or vignettes, were captured where they revealed the nature of the experience for study participants.

Due to the instructional nature of the intervention – a programme was developed and then delivered to the study group – the researcher became a highly participative observer of the case. This subjective and involved role

was seen as highly desirable in this instance because it would provide the researcher with hands-on experience of the programme and the opportunity to improvise as required. Such participation by the researcher in the group activities has the important benefit of building trust within the group which was necessary for the disclosure of important, personal information.

Wardhaugh (1992) cautions that researchers who collect data in situations in which they themselves are taking part, ought to include data on their own behaviours in relation to others, and to analyse their role in the interactions with others. The researcher's subjectivity in this case study was considered a useful and explicit resource which would enable rather than obstruct the research. This subjectivity was captured using observational notes taken in a research diary after each workshop. At times it was possible to record observations during a workshop, but the intensive participation in the programme by the researcher generally precluded this from happening.

Focus group sessions were held with all participants during the first and last workshops. They were semi-structured around pre-determined questions which were asked in an 'open-ended' manner to encourage all participants to elaborate on their answers. The questions were derived from an introductory written questionnaire which the girls completed before the conversation. A complete list of the questions from Workshop One is available in Appendix C. Some examples are listed here:

What does it mean to be gifted?

What is the best thing about being gifted?

What would change for me if I stopped getting high grades?

What does it mean to be a perfectionist?

Does perfectionism help or hinder my progress?

It was hoped that by provoking discussion of issues, these sessions accessed the complexity of both the community of participants and the issue of interest. Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest that

In focus groups, the goal is to let people spark off one another, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original problem that any one might not have thought of (p.140).

As regards the disadvantages of focus groups or group interviews, it is noted that they are of limited use in allowing the researcher to aim a series of follow-up questions at one specific member of the group (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987). Audiotapes were used to record these conversations in order to catch the exact words used and by whom. The researcher was part of the group and as such could not take adequate notes during the conversations. Taped material was transcribed by the researcher immediately after the workshop session (within 24 hours) so context and the identity of the speakers were recalled. While some have found recording devices to be intrusive and distracting, this was not the case among the participants in this study. In fact, the presence of the small microphone on the floor in the centre of the circle of chairs had the effect of slowing down the conversation, encouraging minimal overlapping and allowing for the more reticent girls to participate.

Textual information was gathered from several sources: firstly, from a written questionnaire administered at the start of the Workshop One which prepared the girls for the ensuing conversation topic (see Appendix C). Colangelo (1993) encourages use of brief written questionnaires to begin group discussions with gifted students. Written responses help students to sort, assess and objectify their feelings, and give them an opportunity to look inside, quietly focussing on the topic for discussion. When students are prepared in this way, they are reportedly more ready to share and to interact spontaneously beyond the questionnaire. Colangelo (1993) observes this

technique seems to promote genuineness and seriousness in the students' responses.

Secondly, data was collected in personal diaries which the girls used at different points during the workshops. Thirdly, the Pleasure-predicting sheets were collected during workshops three, four and five (see Appendix G). And fourthly, a field journal was kept by the researcher of reflective notes, observations, intentions and verbatim expressions during the workshops (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

A combined interview was conducted by the researcher with two of the participants once the programme had concluded (see Appendix M). Parlett and Hamilton (1972) support "theoretical sampling" of some research groups, especially of those individuals who have unique or special positions in the group or particular insights on the research issue. In this instance, both girls were chosen because they had identified most strongly with the model of perfectionist thinking presented in the programme. They had engaged fully in the programme, scored highly on perfectionism assessments and were eager to apply their learning more fully. A follow-up interview was considered a useful step in reinforcing the new information and in guiding the girls toward more sustainable learning attitudes. In addition, it would provide more insight regarding the effect of the programme on the participant group.

The research project was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (see Appendix A). In accordance with Massey University's Code of Ethical Conduct for Teaching and Research involving Human Participants, an Information Sheet (see Appendix A) was provided to all participants along with a Consent Form which required a signature from the student and the parent or guardian. The Information Sheet provided sufficient detail about the nature and content of the study that participants were able to give informed consent. The Information Sheet also detailed steps

that were taken to protect the participants' confidentiality and anonymity, as well as the rights of participants, such as the right to withdraw from the study at any time and the right to have taping equipment turned off at anytime.

3.4 Selection of Participants

Female adolescents were chosen as the participant group for the study because of the perceived vulnerability of this population to perfectionistic thinking. Chapter Two highlighted the nature of that vulnerability in relation to role expectations, self-efficacy, underachievement, and related pathologies such as depression and eating disorders.

In addition, the period of late adolescence is considered a period of permeability of the perfectionistic system. In other words, interventions with this age group will leverage the maximum result. This is likely due to two factors, according to Barrow and Moore (1983): developmental tasks and environmental demands faced at this stage. Developing autonomy causes adolescents to question expectations and values; therefore perfectionistic thinking patterns may also be questioned. Challenges from the adolescent's environment such as increasing workload and complexity of schoolwork may also show up perfectionistic strategies as ineffective. So, the period of adolescence provides a sensitive period for addressing unhelpful cognitive processes before these patterns become rigid and resistant to change (Barrow and Moore, 1983). Support for intervention during the teenage years comes too from a systems consideration of fundamental solutions to perfectionism and will be presented in the next chapter in Figure 4.2.

Students from the two Year 10 streamed classes of a local single-sex high school were invited to participate in the study. Inclusion in the school's streamed class identified the students as gifted. Multiple criteria had been used as a basis for their placement in this class; achievement tests and teacher

recommendation from the girl's previous school were the most salient sources of information for identification as gifted.

Conditional permission was initially obtained from the Principal of the high school who indicated that approval for the proposal would also be required from the Board of Trustees. Such consent was obtained after the Board had considered the research proposal, requested and obtained a Police Check on the researcher, and verified that the Massey University Human Ethics Committee had approved the study.

The Principal suggested Friday 8.30 – 9.30 a.m. each week for the 6 one-hour workshops. This is officially outside of school hours so no provision had to be made to occupy those girls who declined to participate. The Principal pointed out that various study skills programmes and extension activities are scheduled in this time slot and they are well supported, therefore, we could expect an adequate response from the girls. Provision is made at the school for supplementary activities as part of the Gifted and Talented Programme, and this study would readily form part of that provision.

Invitations were made during a personal visit by the researcher to the Form class of both streamed groups. It was thought that this approach would be most likely to yield a positive response from the girls since they would establish some initial rapport with the researcher and they were already accustomed to responding to requests, announcements and notices during this period of the day. An Information Sheet along with a Consent Form was distributed to all students in both classes along with a request to return forms by the end of the week. It was hoped that at least fifteen, but up to as many as twenty students would respond to make up the research group, which would commence the following week.

The research group were assessed for perfectionistic tendencies during Workshop One using the Burns Perfectionism Scale (1980) (see Appendix B), however, the entire group regardless of scores were then invited to join the programme, since the benefits of non-perfectionistic modelling of cognitive and behavioural responses were considered to be a valuable input to the programme (Barrow and Moore, 1983).

3.5 Use of the Burns Perfectionism Scale

The Burns Perfectionism Scale (BPS) is a 10-item scale designed to measure an individual's perfectionistic thoughts and beliefs (see Appendix B). Each item is rated on a 5-point scale from 0=*I disagree strongly* to 4=*I agree strongly* (Rodway and Ferguson (1994). Scores above 20 are classified as perfectionists. Burns (1980) developed the measure by modifying a portion of the Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale adding items that measure perfectionism.

Hewitt, Mittelstaedt and Wollert (1989) have concluded that the BPS has adequate internal consistency characteristics for research purposes. They also indicate that the measure has convergent, discriminant and predictive validity, and that it seems to measure self-oriented perfectionism. The BPS has been correlated highly with all subscales of the Multi-dimensional Perfectionism scale developed by Frost, Marten, Lahart and Rosenblate (1990).

The BPS is a self-report measure, as the "bulk of research in perfectionism has been limited to the use of self-report measures rather than an interviewer-based method" (Shafran et al, 2001, p. 885). The implication of this bias is that data generated with these measures is vulnerable to distortion by the individual completing the measure. Ferguson and Rodway (1994) suggest validating such measures by an independent observer if possible. Perfectionists are often vulnerable to the influence of the "social desirability response set" where they may answer according to how they think they

'should' respond rather than how they really feel. In the present study, following the lead of Ferguson and Rodway (1994), it was emphasized to the girls that there were no right or wrong answers.

While the BPS was the measure of choice in this study, it is acknowledged that the scale was developed for an adult population who likely had clinical levels of perfectionism. This will need to be considered when reviewing the data generated from the study group.

3.6 Analysis of data

Qualitative data analysis is a creative process of deriving meaning by recognising emergent themes or patterns relevant to the research question (Huberman and Miles 1998). It is highly advisable to begin analysis as soon as data is collected and to this end, although minimal formal analysis was undertaken, I made field notes and observations after each workshop.

Data collection and analysis tend to occur simultaneously in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Emerging insights and hunches inform the next phase of the programme, which in turn may refine or alter the original research questions. Development of this programme, therefore, became an interactive process as the researcher simultaneously collected and recorded data, made initial interpretations, and then redirected future data collection efforts. In this way, principles of action research were drawn on as modifications to practice were made based on self-evaluation and assessment of the effects of the intervention.

One of the first decisions made about how to write up qualitative data was to present the case in the most ordinary and natural manner possible. Stake (1995) insists that the reporting of case study in particular needs to be personal, describing the things of our sensory experiences. Emphasis on time, place and person are the first three major steps to recreating the experience

for the reader. The aim should be to provide opportunity for vicarious experience, so well constructed that readers feel as though it is happening to them. It is important to embed the reader in the case because the conclusions of the case are arrived at through personal engagement in the material. In this way, naturalistic generalisations are drawn by both researcher and the reader of the case study. The case study is written as a story, which contains the necessary balance of detail and ambiguity for readers to feel they are in a conversation with the author. Stake (1995) warns researchers against obtrusive interference in the reader's experience by making repeated observations and interpretive remarks. To assist in the validation of naturalistic generalization, Stake (1995, p. 65) makes the following suggestions:

- include accounts of matters the readers are already familiar with so they can gauge the accuracy, completeness and bias of reports of other matters.
- provide adequate raw data prior to interpretation so that the readers can consider their own alternative interpretations.
- use ordinary language to describe the methods of case research

Keeping these ideas in mind, a rich, descriptive narrative was prepared to introduce each of the six workshops. These descriptions incorporated selected events, dialogue and vignettes to bring out the essential character of the case. Researcher comments are kept to a minimum and are inserted in comment boxes alongside the narrative.

As for the overall organisation of the report, Stake (1995) asserts that the traditional research report of statement of the problem, review of literature, design, data gathering, analysis and conclusions, is particularly ill-fitting for a case study report. The case is not a problem or a hypothesis. Rather, he encourages researchers to adopt whatever structure contributes best to the reader's understanding of the case. For this report a chronological

development was selected which follows the delivery of the programme through the six workshop sessions. Each workshop is presented in a separate chapter, and includes both the narrative description along with a section on analysis and interpretation.

Both categorical aggregation and direct interpretation are used to reach meanings about the data of the case. The narratives in particular allow exploration of individual instances without reference to repetition of phenomena. In addition, some instances of objective tallying of incidents, remarks or behaviours were noted in order to draw generalisations about the participants individually and as a group. For example, the gradual process of identifying girls with perfectionistic tendencies relied on accumulation of conformational and disconfirmational data from multiple sources until the most informed assertion could be made. This process, known as methodological triangulation, allowed the most valid interpretation of the data to be made. It allows readers to form their own opinions of the girls' perfectionism before being presented with the researcher's conclusions.

Thematic analysis was useful in detecting patterns in the girl's conversation and in their written responses to questionnaires. At times the themes or patterns were drawn from the literature, as in the case of identifying perfectionistic thinking, and formed a template for the analysis. At other times the patterns emerged from multiple readings of the transcripts.

It is acknowledged that much art and much intuitive processing goes into the search for meaning from qualitative research. While efforts are made to validate a researcher's assertions by seeking alternative explanations and finding disconfirmational data, ultimately the researcher offers a personal view. It may not be the definitive view but, as Geertz (1973, p. 20) says:

"It is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something"

CHAPTER 4: *Models influencing the study*

In order for an intervention to be replicable it needs to be based on sound conceptual models that explain key elements of its design. Models enable others to understand the basis for actions taken and to experiment with alternative strategies for intervening.

This chapter outlines three models used in designing this intervention. Two models examine development and maintenance of perfectionism, and identify areas where change is needed and when intervention should take place. The third model deals with the process of fundamental change and suggests how to create conditions necessary for successful change.

4.1 Development and maintenance of perfectionism

Perfectionism can be understood as an effort to achieve cognitive consistency. People seek consistency between their beliefs, their judgements of self and their behaviour (Festinger, 1957). When there is a perceived mismatch between any of these three forces, tension or dissonance results. This 'cognitive dissonance' drives efforts to close the gap and thus resolve the tension.

A perfectionist may hold a belief such as "Only perfect performance is acceptable" and may make the personal judgement "I am a worthwhile person", yet observes that her performance on tasks is not perfect. There are three options for closing the gap and resolving this tension, as shown in Figure 4.1

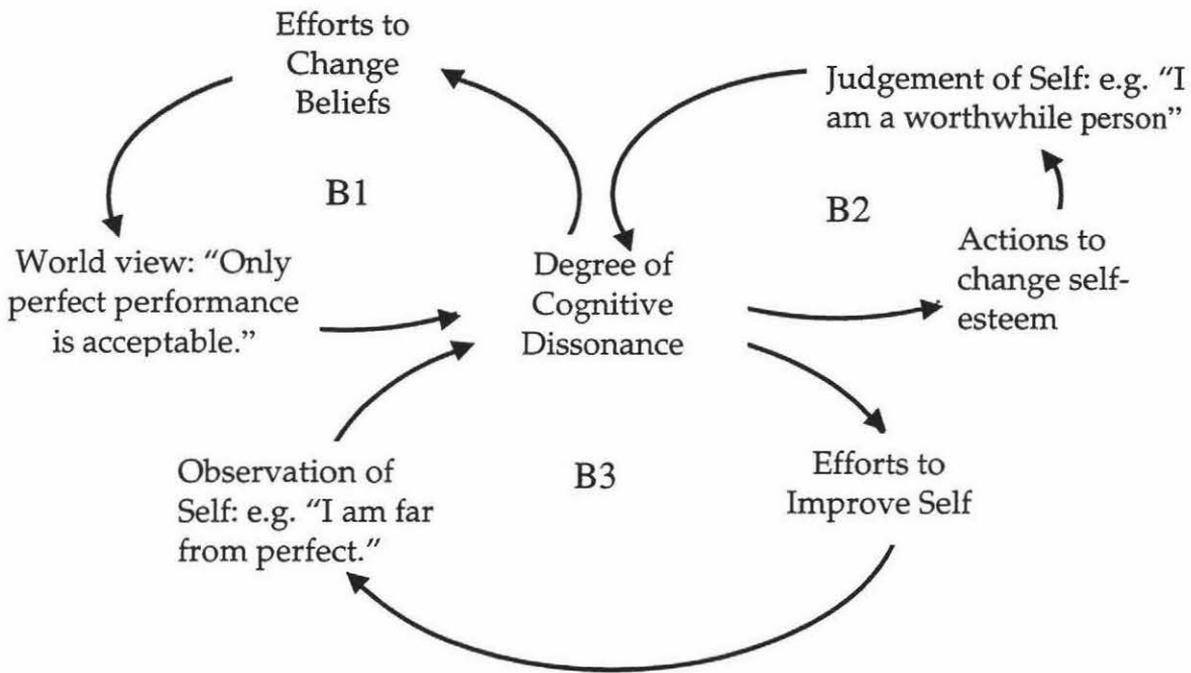


Figure 4.1: The dynamics of perfectionism: A systems view (Ramsey & Ramsey, in press)

Loop B3 is a willpower driven attempt to change oneself in order to meet the standards of perfection. This is about striving to become perfect so that there is consistency: "I'm worthwhile", "Only perfect performance is acceptable", and "Hey, look – I'm performing in a perfect way – I'm acceptable." Where a perfectionist believes that personal worth and acceptance is conditional on perfect performance, this self-improvement strategy is doomed to fail. Try as she might, she cannot achieve the perfect standards she strives for. Basco (1999) refers to this destructive cycle as an "endless striving in which each task is seen as a challenge and no effort is ever good enough, yet the person continues in desperation to avoid mistakes, achieve perfection, and gain approval" (p. 45). Barrow and Moore (1983) refer to this dynamic as a 'compulsive cycle' where the answer to less-than-perfect performance and the unpleasant emotional response is a resolution to try harder and be 'perfect' the next time.

After some efforts to close the gap by working around the B3 loop with growing frustration, perfectionists might attempt to achieve consistency by changing their judgements about themselves (loop B2). Tragically, this would normally involve changing "I am a worthwhile and valuable person" to "I am not a worthwhile or valuable person". This change brings temporary consistency: "Only perfect performance is acceptable", "My performance is not perfect" and "I'm not a worthwhile person" harmonise for a time. However, it is likely the perfectionist will eventually decide: "I want to be worthwhile" and will start to work around the B3 loop again. It may be that a second belief is operating: "Non-worthy people do not deserve the acceptance of others."

The alternative approach is to work around loop B1, this time challenging the belief "Only perfect performance is acceptable". This is such a core belief that it is difficult for a perfectionist to accept that she should compromise or lower her standards. To do so is not the sort of thing that a worthwhile person would do. The perfectionist is in a Catch-22: needing to alter this belief but prevented from doing so by the very belief that needs to be changed.

According to Burns (1980) many perfectionists have complained that traditional treatment methods are unsatisfactory. These methods have relied on a diagnosis of perfectionism and have followed up with exhortations to "stop being so perfectionistic" and to "be a little easier on yourself". One first-year law student is quoted by Burns (1980) as saying: "My therapist ... suggested that if I would stop being so perfectionistic, I'd feel better, but she never told me how to go about doing that. I'd like to get over my perfectionism. But how do I proceed?" (p. 44). This requires the perfectionist to act on a set of beliefs to which they are strongly opposed. If they could apply this advice, they would not be perfectionists; compromising their standards is not something perfectionists do.

Similarly, Swift and Spivack (1975) emphasise that helping perfectionists develop more realistic expectations is a process that needs to be couched within a context of acceptance of their motivation to achieve and their need to feel satisfied with their accomplishments. So, it is important to acknowledge the Catch-22 by not dismissing perfectionists' concerns as unfounded, or to minimize their need to put in best efforts.

It is worth exploring whether the perfectionist would be more likely to change the "Only perfect performance is acceptable" belief if she is challenged to raise the standard, or more correctly, to broaden the standard. This reframing of perfectionism underpins the proposed intervention of this study.

The intention is to present perfectionists with the challenging alternative belief that "Acceptable work involves high performance, high quality of learning and high quality of experience (Gallwey, 2000). Gallwey posits a three-part model of sustainable work which is relevant to the concept of life-long learning and which will form the theoretical basis for the research programme. Performance and learning are interdependent opposite values (Ramsey, 1999) so that effort in one area creates a need for the other. Efforts to perform well, therefore, create the need for a worthwhile person to put effort into learning. And true learning means embracing both failure and mistake-making on the path to high levels of performance. This model is summarised in Appendix H.

This systems model allows more than a simple description of phenomenology; core maintaining mechanisms are identified and potential interventions points are highlighted.

Figure 4.1 charts the dynamics of perfectionism and highlights the need to intervene at the level of the perfectionist's world view. As described by systems theorists, this is the 'point of leverage' or the 'fundamental solution'

(Senge, 1990). Systems theory describes the consequences of not addressing fundamental solutions using an archetypal CLD (causal loop diagram) known as 'Shifting the Burden'. Figure 4.2 shows the 'Shifting the Burden' CLD pertinent to perfectionism. This diagram has important implications for when intervention should take place.

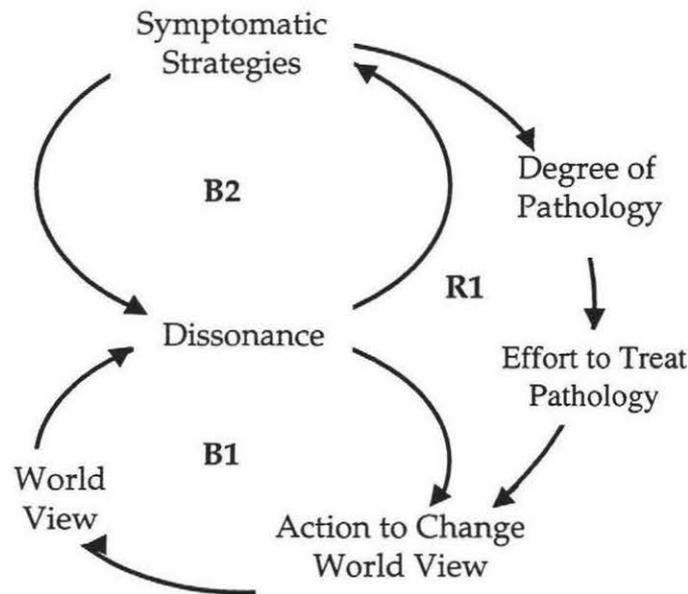


Figure 4.2 'Shifting the Burden' archetype applied to perfectionism.

In Figure 4.2, loop B1 represents the fundamental solution. Dissonance experienced by the perfectionist is a symptom of an unhealthy, unrealistic and unsustainable world view. Ideally, the symptom will cause the perfectionist to take action to change the world view.

However, many perfectionists respond to the dissonance by activating loop B2. Rather than change their world view they attempt to cover up the dissonance with strategies that treat the symptom, while leaving the underlying cause intact. As discussed when considering Figure 4.1,

symptomatic strategies include striving for perfect levels of performance and altering judgments of self.

Because the fundamental cause of the dissonance is unchanged the symptom will reappear, with further recourse to the symptomatic strategies. Whenever a symptomatic strategy is adopted, however, loop R1 is activated. Over time, use of symptomatic strategies may lead to development of associated pathologies. As discussed in Chapter Two, those pathologies most closely associated with perfectionism are depression and eating disorders.

As these pathologies emerge, R1 shows that increased effort must go into their treatment. The cost of treating the pathology is that fewer resources are available to support action to change the world view.

In summary, Figure 4.2 shows how the burden of treating perfectionism is shifted from treating the world view to treating associated pathologies. This process is evident from the literature on treatment of perfectionism. A distinction is made between functional and clinical perfectionism, where the clinical type occurs with attending pathologies. Most interventions seem to occur at the clinical level when the distorted thinking has become maximised, with perfectionism being treated alongside the depression or eating disorder (Shafran, 2002b).

The implication of this diagram is that it will be more effective to bring about change to the world view of perfectionists before pathologies develop and bring about a clinical disorder. Kaye (1996) observes that perfectionism precedes pathologies such as anorexia and may persist for at least a year after anorexics have recovered – suggesting that perfectionism is not a side effect of anorexia but a personality trait that puts people at risk for developing the disorder. This means that prevention programmes may be more effective if they focus their efforts on perfectionistic teens.

Shafran (2002b) supports an earlier intervention approach to perfectionism, citing the intractability of the disorder once it has developed associated pathologies. Perfectionists, she notes, typically come to the attention of mental health professionals only once they have progressed to the stage of a clinical disorder.

Morill and Hurst (1971) and Ferguson and Rodway (1994) have stressed the need for interventions that facilitate developmental progression and prevent the formation of serious psychological problems. These interventions then need to be made available and made relevant to populations beyond those with immediate crises or psychological disturbance. Ferguson and Rodway's Cognitive-Behavioural Treatment of perfectionists within a social work setting suggests further exploration of perfectionism in childhood, given that seven of the nine participants in their study recalled perfectionistic striving in their early school year.

4.2 Conditions necessary to change the world view of perfectionists

As discussed above, this study takes the position that fundamental change involves helping perfectionists develop broader and more complex core beliefs. What conditions enable such fundamental change to take place?

Kirk (2000) draws attention to the way in which all living organisms transform themselves to increased levels of complexity. She points to chaos as the beginning of the growth cycle; chaos induced by 'energy-rich input' from the environment. Such an input in a natural system might be in the form of heat, light or nutrients. For organisations, it might take the form of new technology, changes in government regulations, training, or new competition. In the case of an individual, energy-rich input might come from a provocative conversation, education, an experience and so on. As this input is received by the living system the level of stress within the system rises and creates increasing agitation. Prigogine (1998) labels this process of agitation

“perturbation” (Figure 4.3). The challenge for a living organism is to make choices that encourage dynamic change while still valuing stability.

Depending on how an organism handles the perturbation, one of two things will happen. The system may fail to grow, opting to revert to old structures or the system will “snap”, leaping to a higher, more complex level of operating. This decisive moment is what Prigogine calls “the bifurcation point”. The choices made in the midst of chaos determine whether or not the individual is receiving the new input, converting it into learning and then, at the bifurcation point, spontaneously emerging into new structures and behaviours.

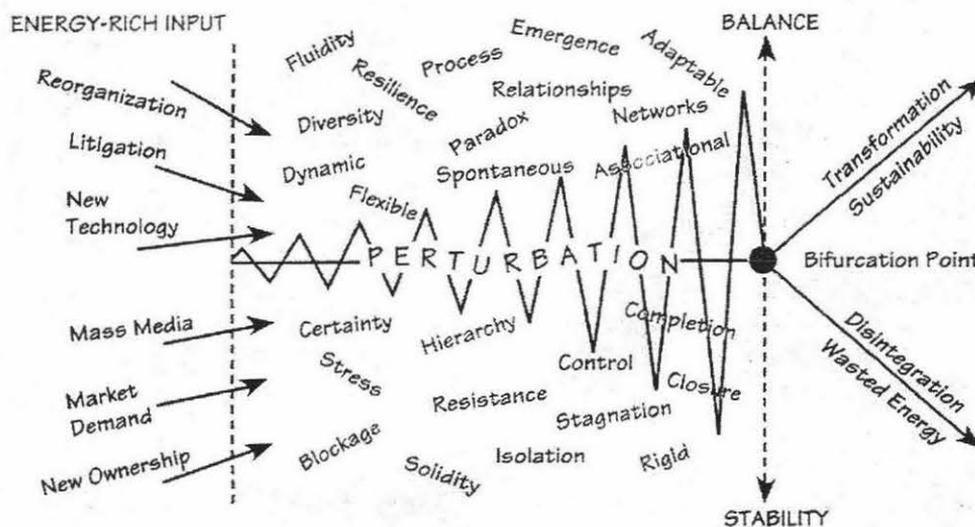


Figure 4.3: ‘The Cycle of Dissipative Structures’ (Kirk, 2000)

Kirk (2000) suggests that individuals “*by design, reject data that does not fit the prevailing paradigm*” (p.4). This of course, is detrimental to future growth, since new information is necessary for adjustment and change. She suggests that we need to consciously choose to open our filters to receive all pertinent information, instead of blocking out data that doesn’t fit within the status quo. She cites arrogance and certainty as two attitudes that convince us we are always right. Antidotes to these attitudes and their associated

'blocking' behaviours are curiosity, openness, and a willingness to explore new options.

For this study the context of improvisational drama has been chosen as a means of generating a safe environment, within which to explore and be curious about energy-rich ideas related to perfectionism and sustainable learning (Heifetz, 1994). Some of these ideas will come from the Sustainable Work model of Gallwey (2000) which stresses the need to balance the three areas of performance, learning and experience. Other input will come from class discussion, personal experimentation, experience of the improvisational games and the failure celebrations. Initially, exposure to these energy-rich ideas will generate perturbation, rather than an immediate switch to a new pattern of behaviour, a new attitude or world view. Without sufficient psychological safety in the environment, subjects may escape the anxiety of perturbation by returning to old patterns.

Figure 4.3 indicates that the conditions under which perturbation take place affects what happens at the Bifurcation point. While we cannot control the choice at the point, we can create conditions that encourage the 'snap' to higher operating levels. This study aims to do this by 1) using improvisational drama to create a supportive environment which welcomes chaos and 2) guiding the process with a trained facilitator.

In keeping with a more developmental philosophy of intervention, the study aims to provide an experience that can stimulate and facilitate developmental progression, not 'cure' a malady (Barrow and Moore, 1983).

CHAPTER 5: *Development of the Programme*

5.1 Use of Improvisational Drama

Work with perfectionists needs to go beyond helping them appreciate the need for balancing the three areas of *performance, learning* and *experience*. While students may intellectually grasp the need for this balance, they are hindered from making personal changes by their extreme sensitivity to failure (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). Improvisational drama is an area that holds promise regarding a process of desensitisation to failure and embracing of uncertainty. The challenges of improvisation confront the specific fears that maintain perfectionistic thinking.

The improvisational model throws out the script, relying on the players to innovate and to be unpredictable as they build small dramatic scenes or respond to various game directions. The players must think on their feet, pay attention to several things at once and cope with situations for which they are not prepared. In addition, they must be tuned in to one another, listening carefully, taking cues from others and continuing in directions that others have started (Kanter, 2002). These conditions and demands correspond to those described by Kirk (2000) as conducive to successful perturbation, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Challenges of improvisation that contribute to perturbation are exemplified in the game "My Word, Your Word" where players must respond to the events of the moment. In pairs, they alternate turns to create a story, one word at a time. Trying to force the outcome cannot work because each player has no control over the contribution of the other. The story is lost if players stop concentrating on what is being said in the present moment. Scripted storylines become impossible. Perfectionistic attempts to control outcomes

immediately backfire so success comes from flexibility and real-time responsiveness. A list of Improvisational Games used in the study is provided in Appendix E. Improvisation addresses the perfectionist's cognitive style and associated behaviours in the following ways:

5.1.1 *Learning to fail*

A student's normal reaction to failure is disrupted during improvisation in a number of ways. The environment within which improvisation takes place expects and even celebrates failure. To be successful, improvisation cannot be scripted or prepared in advance (Newton, 1999). For this reason, participants are encouraged to treat failure as a normal part of the process. Delivering scripted responses—ones that have been thought out in advance—is treated as one of the few things a student can do that will not advance the action or build the scene.

Players (as participants in improvisation are called) can be told that failure is a sign that they are approaching the work correctly. In this way improvisational drama, unlike most activities a perfectionist might engage in, *requires* the student to experience failure, to make mistakes, in order to achieve successful outcomes. And importantly, perfectionists benefit from the experience of failure in a supportive environment since they are reassured that they will recover and that this will not destroy their lives (Burns, 1999).

5.1.2 *Learning to be flexible*

In an improvisational setting, players can't be rigid about the right way to do something. Rather, the responsiveness and emergence of this process along with the collaborative nature of most of the games, encourages students to consider multiple choices, and to be open to alternatives rather than aiming for one correct response.

Adderholt and Goldberg (1999) stress that there is often more than one solution to a problem, and that truly creative individuals become adept at shifting gear, changing direction and yielding to suggestions of others. The rigidity of perfectionistic thinking causes many gifted adolescents to avoid taking healthy risks that might help them grow. Instead, they live in constant anxiety about 'getting it wrong'.

Adderholt and Goldberg (1999) suggest that the challenge for perfectionists is to "make friends with uncertainty and ambiguity" (p. 87). This is especially difficult for perfectionists who are so uncomfortable with uncertainty they plan their lives well in advance. Yet, it is flexibility to changing circumstances that leads to truly outstanding performance. Providing opportunities for perfectionists to be confronted with uncertainty is a strategy endorsed too by Shafran, Cooper and Fairburn (2002) who say it could be helpfully tackled using procedures from the cognitive-behavioural treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

5.1.3 "Coming into the moment"

To be relaxed yet focussed on the demands of the present is to be 'in the moment'. Such relaxed concentration allows for in-depth listening, creative responding and flexibility. The stiffening and tensing associated with perfectionistic striving, takes an individual out of the moment and reduces responsiveness. Perfectionists try hard to do well. They interpret the feelings of struggle and striving as a sign they are doing what is right. Yet, in the 'trying' they attempt to control the process and thereby create a distance between themselves and what they are aiming for. Nachmanovitch (2002) likens 'trying hard' to looking this way and that for your own head, and he claims that the key to true creative success lies in surrendering control, to stop 'trying'.

Improvisation cannot be controlled or pursued as an outcome. In fact, to try to do improvisation is oxymoronic. Success comes as a side-effect of focused concentration on the improvisational experience. Improvisation thereby enhances one's ability to find rewards in the events of the moment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

5.1.4 *Learning to laugh*

Perfectionists as a rule take things very seriously (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). They have a hard time laughing, especially at themselves. Adderholt and Goldberg (1999) encourage perfectionists to learn to laugh more. They cite biophysical reasons why laughter makes people feel better: "it increases your respiratory activity and heart rate, stimulates your circulatory system, and reduces stress. Meanwhile your pituitary gland releases chemicals that add to your sense of well-being" (p 62). In particular, these researchers point to the need for perfectionists to hold a lighter view of their mistakes and failures.

Holt (1996) points out that humour involves flexibility, which can alter a student's perspective and response to a stressor. For a high achieving adolescent, that stressor might be a self-imposed expectation to be clever or to get the right answer. Humour can help adolescents to interpret events, including failure, in a less threatening manner. Monson (1994) says "laughter and humour deserve to be used as a means to enhance appropriate educational programmes for the gifted and talented... humour can ... diffuse painful experiences and subtly point up foibles with less damage to the self-esteem of the child" (p 14). He identifies a further benefit as improved thinking and an enhanced learning environment. Barrow and Moore (1983) have found while treating perfectionists that "spontaneous humour, particularly directed at perfectionistic folly, can facilitate awareness and shifting of cognitive patterns" (p 613).

While improvisational games do not encourage players to 'try to be funny', their rules are structured so that humorous moments occur spontaneously. Often the most hilarious moments relate to unexpected events and 'failures'.

5.1.5 Experiencing creativity in play

Jung (1923) says the creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves. Nachmanovitch (1990) concurs, and he coins the term 'galumphing' to describe the spirit of joyous play associated with frivolous activity which is part of the creative process.

The creativity associated with improvisation occurs in the context of play. In other words, it is without 'why'; it exists as its own destination. The focus is on the process, not the end product. Improvisation in play is intrinsically satisfying; it is its own reward. In this way, improvisation disrupts the compulsion of the perfectionist to strive exclusively toward end results, sacrificing creativity and enjoyment in the process. Burns (1999) supports this process orientation as an important step in overcoming perfectionism. He encourages the setting of modest process goals and suggests that satisfaction and productivity will ensue as a result.

Improvisation games are structured in such a manner that creativity becomes a natural by-product of the activity. Creativity is encouraged by removing attitudes and behaviours that block action – for example, habitual 'no-saying' to any idea that cannot be immediately supported will quickly stifle development of a scene. Responses need to be rapid ("go with your first thought") rather than well considered, so thinking is 'in the moment'.

5.1.6 Confronting fear

The perfectionist is debilitated by fear: fear of being ordinary, of not being funny or clever or witty, of being thought foolish, or fear of being discovered

to be a fake. Fear fuels the obsessive striving to polish things to the ultimate, to push relentlessly to achieve to an outstanding level. Perfectionists spend huge amounts of energy avoiding the possibility of being confronted with their fears. Improvisation lowers the stakes for perfectionists because it removes the threat of dreaded consequences, and because failure is confronted and survived many times in each session.

The safe haven created by the context of play allows the perfectionist to respond in a more open and curious manner to the events of each moment. It also provides a practice field within which to experiment with decision-making without suffering 'permanent' consequences (Newton, 1999). Within this safe environment the perfectionist is more likely to explore the not-known and the opportunities to learn new things (Cohen, 1996). Their fears come to have less of a hold on them.

5.1.7 Experiencing change and integration

The most significant consequence of the improvisational experience, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), is change – change precipitated by continual integration. He writes:

There are two main strategies we can adopt to improve the quality of life. The first is to try making external conditions match our goals. The second is to change how we experience external conditions to make them fit our goals better (p.32).

Improvisation immerses players in a process-oriented environment where they must justify and integrate external conditions to promote the improvisational process and keep the action moving forward. Perfectionistic blocks to thought and action are challenged and overcome.

5.1.8 Experiencing decisiveness

Perfectionists constantly worry about making the wrong decision. They toss around all options and their possible consequences until they are paralysed by indecision. Nachmanovitch (1990) says it is as if they append a little

superscription “but on the other hand, maybe not” to every impulse. If the decision is delayed long enough it may be made by default (Basco, 1999), so the perfectionist avoids responsibility and the threat of failure.

Improvisation occurs in real time and moves on decisively once a course of action is begun. There is not opportunity for players to procrastinate, to mull things over endlessly or to drag out arguments once decisions have been made.

Improvisation requires players to take action without having all the information they need. A group of players enter a situation with their collective knowledge and the second they enter, change begins. Successful improvisation is about doing the best you can with what you have (Kanter, 2002).

Adderholt et al (1999) summarise their approach to treating perfectionism as a combination of failure and flexibility. It is normal to fail and it is necessary to be flexible, and a combination of these two seems to yield the best results in human achievement. The technique of improvisational drama encourages such flexibility, creates fun, safe learning environments and embraces failure as a portal to discovery. Improvisational games were an integral part of most workshops in the programme.

5.2 Pleasure-Predicting Sheet

One of the dysfunctional attitudes supporting a perfectionistic cognitive style is that substantial satisfaction cannot come from any activity unless it is performed in an outstanding manner. Burns' (1980) has challenged this distorted thinking using his Pleasure-Predicting Sheet (see Appendix G). Later renamed The Antiperfectionism Sheet (Burns, 1999), this technique has been successful in breaking the illusory connection between perfectionism and satisfaction.

Perfectionists are asked to schedule a series of activities with a potential for personal growth, satisfaction, or pleasure and to predict how satisfying each of them will be, using a figure between 0 and 100. After each activity has been completed, the perfectionist records how satisfying it actually was and estimates how well he or she performed. Many are surprised to find that many of the tasks they do in an "average" or "below-average" way can be the most rewarding. Furthermore, they discover that striving for perfection and performing exceptionally did not guarantee satisfaction.

Shafran et al (2002) support the use of cognitive-behavioural methods to address perfectionist's personal standards and self-criticism in general. They encourage researchers and practitioners to help perfectionists identify and change rules that embody dichotomous thinking. In addition, Basco (1999) has found Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy helpful with working with perfectionists. Her approach is based on the Beck's (1976) work in treating depression and other psychological difficulties, and has resulted in increased self-awareness among perfectionists she has treated. This approach is based on the idea that underlying beliefs or schemas – the way you think – influences your perceptions of yourself and your behaviour, and subsequently your mood. Research by Burns (1999) has documented that negative thinking causing emotional distress nearly always contains gross distortions. Uncovering and changing those distortions are part of successful treatment.

The Pleasure-Predicting sheet was introduced in Workshop Two and maintained over the next two weeks in an attempt to sensitise the girls to occasions when outstanding performance had not guaranteed satisfaction, and to occasions when high levels of satisfaction were achieved on activities where performance was not outstanding.

5.3 'Sustainable Work' Model

Brophy and Rohrkemper (1989) contend that perfectionist students need to relearn performance norms and work expectations. In particular, they need to learn that schools are places to learn knowledge and skills, not merely to demonstrate them.

Literature on organisational behaviour and management suggest that all work is more likely to be sustainable if a more holistic approach is adopted; one that avoids an over-emphasis on perfect performance. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) discusses the need to balance demand and capacity in order to optimise experience. Fritz (1991) contrasts a performance orientation with a learning orientation and maintains that the latter is more likely to generate creative work.

Gallwey (2000) has summarised these contributions by suggesting that for any activity to be sustained, a balance needs to be achieved between performance, learning and experience. Performance refers to efforts to meet current demands using one's existing capacity. Learning involves building capacity for the future, and experience is the quality of life one has while undertaking an activity. Gallwey's three-dimensional model forms a basis for holistic measurement of achievement (Ramsey, Wells, Franklin & Ramsey, 2001). This approach to achievement was presented via a mini-lecture to the participants in Workshop Two of this research intervention. A handout summarising the model and its implications for perfectionistic thinking was distributed to the study group in Workshop Three and is included in Appendix H.

5.4 Group Intervention

Barrow and Moore (1983) claim that treatment of perfectionism has focussed on remedial individual counselling (Burns, 1980; Hamachek, 1978). Their own research presents ideas for structured group interventions, and they cite

several specific advantages to a group approach. These include: support from others struggling with similar concerns; exposure to a number of different models of new cognitive and behaviour responses to situations; and provision of spontaneous group process for encouraging cognitive shifts. It is the last point that most strongly supports the group approach of this research. Barrow and Moore (1983) speak of the way in which cognitive constructs at times "spring unexpectedly from immediate experience. The spontaneity and unpredictability of group process provide a rich breeding ground for this kind of cognitive shift" (p 613).

Barrow and Moore's (1983) programme for perfectionistic university students is based on a structured framework of identifying cognitive patterns. Maladaptive patterns are then disrupted by confronting perfectionistic self-talk and developing coping self-talk. Part of the programme is a 'take a chance' experiment where participants are encouraged to take a risk that they had previously been prevented from taking by their perfectionistic thoughts.

The group intervention approach was adopted for this programme along with some follow-up individual interviews.

CHAPTER 6: *Workshop One*

6.1 Introduction

The starting point for analysis or reporting of data is to revisit the original research purpose, since it provides the focus for data selection and the impetus for all thematic interpretation. This study aims to develop a Cognitive Behaviour and Improvisational Drama programme and then examine its effect on a group of gifted adolescent females with varying levels of perfectionistic tendencies.

The subsequent chapters aim to recount the case study intervention in such a way that the reader feels vicariously engaged with the research experience. The goal of the case study is to understand the dynamics of the intervention. Sharing this understanding in useful and 'ordinary' ways with all interested parties is a goal of this analysis. Decisions regarding organisation and presentation of the case have been made on the basis of how well the reader's understanding of the case will be enhanced. One decision to that end is to present each workshop in a separate chapter.

Wolcott (1990) encourages qualitative researchers to start with a basic description of setting and events. He warns against becoming an overly intrusive tour guide through the case study, and advocates separating description from analysis as much as possible. With this counsel in mind, a descriptive narrative is included for each workshop, relatively unencumbered by interpretive comment. At the same time, I am conscious of the need to reconcile Wolcott's view with Stake's (1995) observation that "analysis involves giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p.71). Therefore, some of my initial hunches and observations have been appended alongside the narrative descriptions in an unobtrusive 'comment' box.

The case study will be reported in chronological order from workshop one through to workshop six, followed by the interview with two of the girls from the programme. Adopting a chronological or biographical structure is one option for structuring the write-up of qualitative research, advocated by Wolcott (1990). Some descriptive narrative will be presented initially to set the scene and to create context for each of the workshops. This will be followed by an outline of workshop activities; those that were scheduled, those that were postponed or omitted and those that arose in an unplanned way. In addition, data from other sources such as written questionnaires, diaries, observations, and conversations will be presented as it was captured during the course of the programme. Analysis and initial interpretations will be made at this stage.

Before the report of the case begins, it will be useful to consider attendance at each of the workshops. This will provide an overview of the programme and will establish consistency and regularity data.

6.1.1 What happened with attendance?

By the specified due date for return of consent forms, 15 had been submitted through the Form teachers and held in the main office for collection by the researcher. A final invitation was made via an announcement in the morning notices on the next day. At this stage, I considered a total of 12 or 13 participants would be sufficient for the purposes of this research, given that the group would include some with perfectionistic thinking.

Of the 15 participants who handed in their consent forms, 11 attended the first workshop, and one phoned in sick. Attendance at the second workshop increased to 13, including one new participant with consent form in hand. Since the programme was in the early stages, I decided to include the new girls in the research group. One of these late-comers to the programme pulled

out after her first workshop, and the group stabilised at 11 or 12 attendees for the four subsequent workshops (table 6.0).

Name (Pseudonym)	Work-Shop One	Work-Shop Two	Work-Shop Three	Work-Shop Four	Work-Shop Five	Work-Shop Six	Total
Storm	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Amber	X	ab	X	X	X	X	5
Cool Bananas	ab	X	ab	ab	ab	ab	1
George	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
The Matrix	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
The Terminator	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Bob	ab	X	X	X	ab	X	4
Yoda	X	X	X	ab	X	X	5
The Luck Bear	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Banana Hammock	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Maria Favrina	X	X	X	ab	ab	ab	3
Jose	X	X	X	X	ab	ab	4
Secret Squirrel	ab	X	X	X	X	X	5
Snagglepuss	X	X	ab	X	X	X	5
Total at each workshop	11	13	12	11	10	11	

Table 6.0: Attendance at programme workshops (X=present, ab = absent)

Specific attendance figures ranged from the lowest of 10 participants at Workshop Five, to the highest of 13 participants at Workshop Two. Anyone who attempted to join the programme after the second workshop was not accepted as part of the research group.

I stressed the importance of regular attendance at all six workshops, both for gaining value from the programme and for helping me gather consistent data for the research. As an inducement to the girls to continue getting out of bed

earlier than they needed to on a Friday, I agreed to provide chupa chups (lollipops) at every workshop, and a chocolate cake at the final workshop. Of the regular attendees, 10 attended either five or six of the total number of workshops. Six of the regulars came from each of the two streamed year 10 classes, so many of them were friends already and if not, were at least acquainted with others in the group.

6.2 Workshop One: Purpose

This was a 'getting to know one another' session as well as setting the scene for subsequent workshops. It was important to create a safe environment that would support risk-taking in the improvisational drama activities and self-disclosure in the group conversations. For this reason, two very non-threatening and straightforward activities were introduced in this first session. Most of the time (approximately 30 minutes) was devoted to a semi-structured group conversation where issues related to giftedness and perfectionism were discussed. It was important to assess the level of understanding and awareness of this group before presenting the intended programme.

Important too, in this initial workshop was to begin the diagnostic process of identifying girls with perfectionistic tendencies. It was unlikely that the research sample would include clinically significant perfectionists; therefore the Burns Perfectionism Scale might not be sufficiently sensitive to identify girls who, while not at a clinical level of significance, may be vulnerable to perfectionistic thinking. With this in mind, a determination of perfectionistic tendencies for each girl would be based on a combination of the BPS score, responses in the group conversations, diary entries and my observations. A description of the workshop follows along with some interpretive comment regarding pertinent events, comments and behaviours.

6.3 A description of Workshop One

The time is 8.30 a.m. on a Friday morning in late August. School starts late on Fridays and many girls enjoy an extra hour of sleep on these mornings. Not so for the dozen or so year 10 girls who have volunteered to participate in the six workshops of the 'Life-Long Learning' programme. Eleven of them arrive promptly in ones and in pairs, warmly clad against the chill in their uniform scarves and coats. Despite the cold and the early hour, they are talkative, and seem keen to be there and to meet others who have signed up for the programme. One girl stations herself by the door to the high-ceilinged Drama room as if hosting the session, welcoming others and making sure they come to the right place. Although the room is new to the researcher, the girls seem at home and comfortable with pre-class rituals such as placing their bags and coats on shelves lining the walls. It would appear that classroom protocols have been transferred to this extra-curricular programme.

Girls ask how many are coming to the workshop and they volunteer information about their friends who plan to come. As the workshop begins with an interactive 'Naming Game', the girls follow instructions readily to form a circle. A demonstration of the game is given by the researcher with one girl who makes an early mistake by not following the game instructions accurately. She is quick to laugh and point out that she "always mucks up these kinds of things". The researcher draws attention to failure as a welcome part of the learning process and to the role failure will play in future activities.

The game builds momentum and the girls participate energetically, laughing when they get the order of names wrong or forget the very simple rules of the game. The activity is high-energy and interactive, but seems to become a little time-consuming and at the end of the game some girls are losing interest. A rhythmic pattern of clapping and naming is set up to reinforce recall of the names and another early failure by a girl disrupts the momentum and quietens the noise of clapping. "How could you do this to me so early in the

Comment: It will be interesting to see whether the girls expect a teacher and pupil relationship in the sessions, and if so, how it will be possible to modify those expectations toward a more participant/facilitator relationship. The Drama room seems an excellent choice of venue since it is not set up like a classroom, but rather, consists of large open areas separated by a couple of screens, and contains portable stage furniture such as large cubes and benches. Prior to the workshop the cubes, benches and few chairs have been arranged in a circle at the end of the room near a window - for light and warmth - and near an electric power point for the tape recorder. Consequently the girls do not immediately sit in rows or groups as if in a traditional classroom; rather, they remain standing around in small groups.

Comment: This provides an early opportunity to model response to failure.

morning!" she playfully fires at the researcher. At the suggestion of the researcher, all join in a dance-like celebration of her failure.

Comment: A brief explanation is given of the concept of 'failure celebrations', which will be expanded on next week when everyone will choreograph their own celebration of failure.

It is an energised, buzzing group of girls who then come together and sit in a circle at the request of the researcher. They are given an outline of what to expect in this and subsequent workshops. Today there will be much talking and filling in of questionnaires, but the girls are assured that subsequent sessions will involve more improvisational drama. They seem content with this promise and they fall to the task of completing the Burns Perfectionism Scale. They realise they are required to write and, without asking, they find pens and arrange to lean their A4 sheets of paper against something firm – some use the back of a friend, others use their seat as they kneel on the floor, and others write carefully on their knees. They fill in the form silently, asking few questions, almost as if they are sitting a test. Someone comments, "I never choose the extremes in any of these questionnaires!" The researcher collects the forms and says she will score them later. No one asks for any more details.

Comment: In retrospect, and in view of comments made during the final workshop when the BPS was re-administered, this silence might have signalled a need for more explanation from me about exactly what the items meant. The 'test-like' quality of this time may have stopped the girls asking for clarification, since this is not possible in exam or test conditions.

A written questionnaire is distributed and the girls immediately begin to write their responses – they need no encouragement, this seems completely understandable to them. Once again, they work quietly and individually. After five minutes or so, some have completed their responses and begin to engage in conversation with friends nearby, who may or may not be finished themselves. Comments are passed such as: "These questions are hard", "Oh, there's more on the other side!"

Comment: The girls are familiar with worksheets from their classes and this written questionnaire likely called out highly habitual behaviour from them. I wonder if this may also have been interpreted as a brief test? Might this perception have led some to believe there might be a right and a wrong answer?

At the researcher's request, the girls willingly give consent for a tape recording to be made of the conversation they are about to have. The microphone is a small circular disc the size of a fifty-cent piece, which sits unobtrusively on the floor in the centre of the circle. One girl (who later chooses the pseudonym 'Amber') remarks, "If we're not interesting enough, will you dump us from your study?" The researcher begins the conversation

Comment: This remark may signal perfectionistic tendencies since it links acceptance with high performance. Such a sensitivity to being 'interesting enough' alerted me to possibly high levels of self-criticism and identification of self with achievement.

by asking "What does it mean to you to be gifted?" and then singles out Amber and asks her opinion. Throughout the forty minute conversation that ensues, the girls give thoughtful and considered answers. There is little overlapping of talk; rather, one speaker tends to hold the floor at a time. This is with the exception of Amber, who verbalises much of her thinking at the moment it occurs to her. Talk is mostly 'on topic' and some girls are quick to share personal experiences to illustrate their points. The girls yield to the researcher's direction and attempts to focus the discussion. Some 'process' topics are raised – usually by Amber – such as "Do you go around to other schools and ask these questions?" Also, "These are hard questions." When contributions seem to tail off at one point, the researcher reassures the group that their answers are exactly what she wants; there are no right or wrong answers. Three or four girls tend not to initiate comments but are happy to contribute when asked directly by the researcher. Attention and concentration is maintained throughout and, when the bell rings to signal the start of the next class, most of the girls reassure the researcher that she doesn't have to finish quite yet – there's still another five minutes or so. Energy levels are high when the researcher hints at the topic for next week and brings the conversation to an end.

Comment: Amber has been talkative and highly engaged in the workshop up to this point, and I made an assumption that she would be willing to give an opinion when put on the spot. She was.

Time is rapidly running out as the girls are handed small notebooks to act as diaries for the duration of the programme. They are asked to choose pseudonyms or code names to write on the front of their diaries. A few choose their name instantly and begin to almost 'get into character' with their new identity; many struggle with the decision and ask friends for help, and one girl dislikes her initial choice and asks to change at the last minute. First impressions of the workshop are hastily recorded on the first page of the diaries and then they are collected by the researcher. Remembering only as the girls are disappearing out the door, the researcher calls out that there is a shopping bag of chuppa chups on the table, and everyone can help themselves.

Comment: I am conflicted about the wisdom or otherwise of keeping the girls' diaries between workshops. Keeping them will ensure the girls don't forget them for each workshop, but will not give them opportunity to make notes during the week.

6.4 Plan for Workshop One

What follows is an outline of the scheduled activities for Workshop One.

- Introductions and greetings
‘Naming Game’ is played in a circle. The game environment of the workshops is introduced and all participants greet one another boisterously and shake hands in an established pattern. Researcher explains purpose of research and covers participant consent issues.
- Assessment of perfectionistic tendencies using the Burns Perfectionism Scale (BPS) (see Appendix B). Researcher explains how to complete the scale and girls fill it out individually. BPS forms are collected by researcher to be scored later.
- Written questionnaire on attitudes to learning is handed out (Appendix C). Questions relate to giftedness, achievement, success and perfectionism. Girls complete the questionnaire individually.
- Follow up class discussion based on written questionnaire. Girls sit in a circle with the researcher and respond to questions posed. The conversation is taped after permission is sought (Appendix J for transcript).
- Distribution of diaries and selection of pseudonyms to preserve anonymity for girls. First entries are made in diaries based on initial impressions of the workshop, and then researcher collects and retains diaries for the next workshop.

Postponed activities:

- Discussion of perfectionism and the need for holistic measures of achievement.
- Construction of perfectionism ‘pros and cons’ list (Cost-benefit analysis).

Both these activities rescheduled to Workshop two due to lack of time.

Table 6.1: Workshop One Plan

6.5 Written Questionnaire and Focus Group Results

The purpose of this first workshop was to assess the girls' current level of understanding and awareness of the issues of giftedness and perfectionism. In addition, I intended to begin to aggregate instances of perfectionistic thinking along with observation of the girls' behaviour to begin a rudimentary diagnosis of perfectionism, to be combined with data from their BPS scores. The written responses and the transcribed group conversation were analysed for information pertinent to these two objectives (see Appendix J for full transcript).

Data concerning the girls' understanding of perfectionism comes predominantly from the written questionnaire (see Appendix D for raw data). Data regarding their view of giftedness and their experience of being gifted comes largely from their spoken comments in the conversation. Instances of perfectionistic behaviour or thought have been identified in the transcribed data using accepted categories and characteristics of perfectionism (Burns, 1980; Barrow and Moore, 1983; Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999).

6.5.1 *Dominant themes in girls understanding of perfectionism*

Six questions from the written questionnaire, along with the responses generated have been selected for further analysis. Those questions are:

- What does success mean to me?
- How will I know if I am successful?
- What would change if I stopped getting high grades?
- What does it mean to be a perfectionist?
- What do I mean by 'perfect'?
- Does perfectionism help or hinder my progress?

What does success mean to me?

The most frequent response to this question identified "achieving my goals" as a definition of success. Two responses describe success as "doing my best,"

and one as “getting 90% or above 80%”. Just one respondent qualified her answer with an “it depends on what in”, and then cited different views of success such as ‘a good job’, ‘a family’ and ‘lots of friends’. Two respondents declined to answer this question. The following table summarises these responses (note: respondents can make more than one response).

Table 6.2: Themes from responses to the question “What does success mean to me?”

Theme	Number responses mentioning theme (/11)
Achieving my goals	4
Doing my best	2
Getting 90% or above 80%	1
Different things to different people	1
Something that helps us	1
No response	2

How will I know if I am successful?

Feeling happy or “feeling like I’ve done well” was a dominant theme for an identifying mark of success. One of the five respondents choosing this theme wrote: “I will be happy with just the way I am and just the way I feel”. These responses seem to highlight an intrinsic feeling of personal satisfaction or reward. Three responses suggest that praise from other people is considered a way of knowing one is successful. Eight responses were achievement focussed, targeting goal attainment, good marks on tests and excelling in general.

The following table summarises the results from this question.

Table 6.3: Themes from responses to the question “How will I know if I am successful?”

Theme	Number responses mentioning theme (/16)
<i>Intrinsic rewards</i> I will be happy	5
<i>Achievement rewards</i> I will get good marks	3
I will achieve my goals	3
I will excel	2
<i>Extrinsic rewards</i> I will be praised by others	3

What would change for me if I stopped getting high grades?

The majority of responses to this question suggested that issues of self-worth would change if they stopped getting high grades. Of the 17 recorded responses, 10 of them indicated that high self-esteem and self-worth is considered to be dependant on exceptional performance. One comment from Storm was interesting:

“My self-esteem [would change]. I am not an unsociable person but it is hard for me to make new friends, so all I really have are my grades; they are what keep me proud of myself”.

The link between grades and self-esteem will be explored further in the next section which analyses the group conversation for signs of perfectionism among the girls.

The pervasive influence of high grades on self-worth and happiness seems to be indicated in comments made by Amber:

“My motivation, morale, family life [would change]. All around, things would probably be disagreeable.”

Table 6.4: Themes from responses to the question “What would change for me if I stopped getting good grades?”

Theme	Number responses mentioning theme (/17)
<i>Issues of self-worth</i>	
I would lose self-esteem	5
I would lose motivation	3
I would lose confidence	2
<i>Approval</i>	
I wouldn't get praised	2
<i>Other</i>	
I would lose opportunities	3
I would study harder	2

What does it mean to be a perfectionist?

The majority of responses to this question (13 out of 16) defined a perfectionist as someone who wants “everything to be perfect” and someone who “keeps at things until there are no faults”. Defining perfectionism as flawless performance was pervasive, and in addition, there were indications those respondents believed such a style may be unrealistic and unhelpful.

The 13 responses were re-categorised according to the extent to which they demonstrated awareness of possible adverse consequences from perfectionism. Examples of this awareness include the following comments which hint at a compulsive aspect to perfectionism: “*Having to be the best at everything*”, and “*To want every single thing to be just right*”. Another comment points to the excessive striving of the perfectionist beyond the dictates of circumstance and situation: “*To try and make everything perfect, when it doesn't always have to be*”. Obsessive perfectionistic striving is seen to consume disproportionate amounts of the girls' time as marginal improvements in quality are pursued at the cost of output quantity.

Another comment links the self-esteem of the perfectionist with high achievement: “*Not to be happy with something unless you feel it’s done to the best of your abilities*”. Of the 13 responses citing ‘flawless work’ as the defining mark of perfectionism, six identified possible adverse consequences. Two responses identify doing one’s best and “not settling for second best” as characteristics of the perfectionist.

Table 6.5 Themes from responses to the question “What does it mean to be a perfectionist?”

Theme	Number responses mentioning theme (/16)
To be faultless in everything	13
<i>(Awareness of possible adverse consequences)</i>	(6)
To be the best	2
To be absolutely satisfied with something	1

What do I mean by ‘perfect’?

Once again, the concept of ‘flawless’ performance predominated in the definitions of ‘perfect’. From the five responses supporting this theme, the following comments are typical: “No mistakes, nothing wrong”, and “Absolutely no mistakes”. Four responses stressed the concept of excellence or “the best possible”, and three narrowed their definition to a specific scholastic measure of 100% on a test or assignment. This likely reflects the dominant culture in which the girls spend every school day. It is an assessment-based and achievement-oriented high school culture.

These responses might also be considered under the ‘Flawless’ theme, since they indicate the absence of any mistakes or errors.

Table 6.6 Themes from responses to the question “What do I mean by ‘perfect’?”

Theme	Number responses mentioning theme (/12)
Flawless – no mistakes	5
Excellent	4
100%	3

Does perfectionism help or hinder my progress?

Two of the respondents considered this an either/or question and they wrote: “it hinders because it’s not realistic” and “I would spend more time perfecting things than getting them finished”. Seven responses suggested that perfectionism has a dual effect; it may help or hinder their progress. Four of these seven respondents suggested it may help or hinder equally. Comments included:

“[It can] help and hinder. Hinder because I put myself down. Help because I always want to do better if it’s not perfect.”

and:

“Both. If it is perfect you get better marks. But, I don’t want to spend time making it look perfect instead of working on quality.”

Three respondents maintain that perfectionism is mainly helpful and some of their comments demonstrate this positive view, usually along with a proviso about possible negative effects inserted somewhere or tagged on the end:

“In most cases it helps but sometimes it just makes me do worse”.

“It helps more than hinders to a certain extent because it makes me try harder”.

Some girls claim that perfectionism helps by motivating them to strive for higher standards, to try harder for better marks. Many of the girls identified a causal relationship between perfectionism and high achievement.

One respondent didn't comment on this question and one didn't answer because, as she said, "I wouldn't call myself one [a perfectionist]".

This question required girls to speculate based on their being in the position of a perfectionist. For those who show little or no signs of perfectionistic thinking, their responses will likely be based on their observations and experiences with perfectionistic friends, family members and fellow students.

Table 6.7 Themes from responses to the question "Does perfectionism help or hinder my progress?"

Theme	Number responses mentioning theme (/11)
Helps and hinders equally	4
Mostly helps me	3
Only hinders	2
No response	1
I wouldn't call myself one	1

6.5.2 Dominant themes in girls understanding of giftedness

The group conversation began with the question "What does it mean to you to be gifted? Some of the comments pointed to a perception by the girls of giftedness as a natural or in-born ability.

"It means you're naturally gifted. Naturally good at something. You don't have to try hard you're just naturally good at it."

(Researcher) Is this what you're saying, that if you're naturally gifted you shouldn't have to work too hard at something?

Not as hard as other people." (lines 11-17)

In addition to the spoken comments, eight of the eleven responses from the written questionnaire supported this view of giftedness being a natural ability. Two examples of written responses were "to be naturally good at something" and "to be quite or very good at something without really trying too hard".

Later in the conversation, some comments acknowledge the role of striving and application by suggesting that people may become gifted through hard work:

"...some people get gifted by working really hard but you can't really tell that unless you look at people when they're quite young and they have a natural talent for it or whether they've been learning things for ages and they can be quite gifted at it.

(Researcher) That's interesting compared to what you were saying before about being naturally gifted. So it seems like maybe you're saying you can be naturally gifted but some other people are working really hard to get the high ...

It should work both ways,

but most of the time it is the naturally gifted but it is hard to tell unless you take people when they're young.

Or they could be older but it's just the 1st time they've tried something and they're like really good at it and they don't know in childhood because they've never tried it before." (lines 96-112)

Giftedness is seen to have certain benefits and to bring certain responsibilities. In response to the question "What is the best thing about being gifted?" girls identified pride of achievement and praise from others in their comments:

"... An individualistic thing, being able to do something other people might not be able to do.. and people maybe looking up to you for that.

(Researcher) Like a role model?

Not necessarily. People saying "oh wow, she can do this..." (mock boasting tone)

(Researcher) Something you can be proud of?

Yeah.

Something you can show off about (laughter).

Builds high self-confidence and you get praised a lot which means you get even higher self-confidence in that particular area.

I think it's also the support of knowing that you can have something to fall back on eventually.

Also if you are really good at something it's fun to help other people." (lines 33-52)

Girls acknowledged that they felt pride about being gifted but they added that they had a responsibility to be a 'little bit modest and 'to help other people'. Within the context of a discussion about how open their gifted and talented status ought to be, some of them commented:

"You should be proud of it but you shouldn't rub it in people's faces. You should be a little bit modest.

Lot's of people ask 'are you in a streamed class?' and I just say 'yes' because I don't think it's that big of a deal." (lines 236-240)

At the girls' school it is not common practice for the streamed classes to be informed directly of their gifted and talented status. Asked whether they would prefer to be told from the outset, the girls offered these views:

"I think we should be told because it might motivate someone to get into one next year.

But it shouldn't be quite as ... as (name of local boys high school) ... it's a bit harsh... they have about 7 streams.

(Researcher) *So, what do you think that's about? Not telling you that you're in a streamed class?*

I think girls are more sensitive and some people might get upset, but you find out eventually...

You work it out for yourself... 'oh, we're quite smart, maybe we are a streamed class'

(Researcher) *Did any of you have the experience of looking around the class and thinking 'wow, they're all smart, how did I get in here?'*

(General laughter)... yeah (unanimous agreement).

(Researcher) *Would you prefer to be told?*

Yeah (all) cos it just let's you know where you're at instead of like...

Although it's kind of fun doing a bit of digging. They don't officially say you're in a streamed class... they say you're in a high bandwidth. (with joking hand gesture)

Or Mrs (name of teacher)... 'you're in a narrow band class' (with vocal impersonation of teacher). Or they say 'because of the 'nature' of your class'.

I asked 'are we streamed?' and she said 'oh, I don't know'. Are we freaks?" (lines 199-230)

As well as preferring more open acknowledgement of their gifted and talented status, the girls expressed amusement at the various euphemisms used to disguise the term, and they readily impersonate those who use them. Keeping giftedness 'secret' may have the effect of portraying it as shameful, or as one girl said, "are we freaks?" The girls seemed cognisant of the dilemma facing teachers who wish to avoid discouraging or offending students who are not included in the gifted and talented group. Girls were specifically cited by one as being 'more sensitive' than boys and prone to getting upset. Yet, the consensus view seemed to be that telling girls from the outset would be appreciated. This was despite the somewhat negative reactions from peers which some of the girls identified in this way:

"they say the 'brainy class' but it's just..."

The people in the other classes sometimes make you feel a bit stink. "Are you in one those brainy classes?" and if you say yes they kind of make you feel stink about it.

They treat you like goody goods.

(Researcher) How does that make you feel?

Annoyed. All you're trying to do is get the best out of high school and stuff.

Kind of excluded. They make you feel that you're set aside from them a bit".
(lines 242-256)

6.5.3 *Identification of perfectionistic themes from the group conversation*

The preliminary stage of diagnosing perfectionistic tendencies among the girls included analysis of spoken responses during the group conversation. The data was examined using external categories drawn from the literature on identifying perfectionism. Instances that fit within the categories were identified, and will be placed alongside corroborating incidents and observations in my interpretive summary of the workshop

Initially, I selected the following 14 characteristics of perfectionism as categories for analysis:

- 1 Imposter Syndrome
- 2 Being ordinary is shameful "I must be perfect"
- 3 Fear of failure (concern over mistakes)
- 4 All-or-nothing thinking
- 5 I am my grades or my achievements(= self esteem)
- 6 Over commitment
- 7 Sensitivity to criticism
- 8 Getting it right – obsessing
- 9 Tyranny of 'shoulds
- 10 Can't savour success
- 11 Lack of self-efficacy – responsible for failure only/self critical
- 12 Goals are rigid necessities – "I must"
- 13 Telescopic thinking – magnify future challenges/ minimise success
- 14 Success = achieving high goals

When I applied these categories to the transcript, then asked an experienced researcher to offer an alternative interpretation, just 11 of the 14 were identified in the data. "Over commitment", "Sensitivity to criticism", and "Goals are rigid necessities" were eliminated from the analysis. Next, I eliminated those categories that had little support from the data (mentioned only once), which reduced the final list to six themes. The final list of categories used as identifiers of perfectionism in the transcribed conversation was:

1. Imposter Syndrome
2. Being ordinary is shameful "I must be perfect"
3. Fear of failure (concern over mistakes)
4. All-or-nothing thinking
5. I am my grades or my achievements(= self esteem)
6. Getting it right – obsessing

Instances from the data have been interpreted under the six categories as follows:

Impostor Syndrome

A general sense that most of the girls in the group were not entirely comfortable with their gifted and talented status comes from their response to two of my questions. One of the questions was in the context of whether or not girls should be told they are gifted. For many of them the process of discovering they were singled out in a streamed class was a lengthy one involving comments from peers, oblique references by teachers and observations of their classmates. I asked "Did any of you have the experience of looking around the class and thinking 'wow, they're all smart, how did I get in here?'" All the girls laughed heartily and agreed that to some extent, they had initially felt like frauds.

The second question was "How do you feel about being gifted girls?" and the following comments were recorded:

Special. (in funny voices accompanied by embarrassed laughter)

(Researcher) *You didn't know you were gifted?*

(Directed to another student – Storm) What do you expect when you get 90s?

(Storm's answer) They're flukes.

(Researcher) *Do you think maybe your high achievements are flukes?*

Sometimes.

(Researcher) *Has anyone ever told you that you might be gifted?*

Yeah some teachers and my friends but they're my friends and they have a biased opinion. (Friends "She doesn't believe us") But I don't know about it, it doesn't really mean anything to me because I set my own standards. (Friend "She's really good at maths and I'm always saying she's really good and she's always saying that she's not") (lines 65-83)

While the embarrassment and laughter came from the entire group, the specific comments about 'flukes' and not believing what others say about being gifted were specific to one girl in the group (Storm). Attribution of her successes to 'flukes' is characteristic of low self-efficacy, which was linked to the Impostor Syndrome by Reiss (1998). Her reluctance to believe the positive, praiseworthy comments from friends may also indicate over-sensitivity to real or imagined disapproval. Burns (1980) notes that "perfectionists ... believe that their foibles will not be acceptable to others...they therefore anticipate and fear rejection...[and they] react defensively to criticism." (p.37). Ferguson and Rodway (1984) noted in their treatment programme for perfectionists that

disapproval from others (real or imagined) was used to fuel the fire of self-criticism. If feedback is negative, perfectionists agonise over it. If, on the other hand, critical feedback was absent, perfectionists tended to assume that others were withholding their genuine reactions. They would conclude, for example, that "people do have concerns about me/my work...they are just being polite and not saying anything about it" (p. 301).

Being ordinary is shameful – I must be perfect

There was a general sense among the girls that great things were expected of them. One comment pointed to the extraordinary potential of the gifted:

“if they (gifted) work at it they can reach unfathomable heights and become nuclear scientists and stuff” (line 129-130)

Those expectations were identified as coming from themselves, their family and from society. When asked how she defined success one girl commented:

“it might depend on whether [they are] your goals or your family’s goals or society’s goals that they set for you. Maybe the goals your family set for you, you can’t make those...” (lines 170-173)

The theme of needing to be extraordinary was evident in part of the conversation which dealt with response to failure. Even in this area the imperative to be anything other than ordinary was evident:

(Researcher) “Put your hand up now if you like to fail.

It depends in what. If you still got the highest then it doesn’t matter. Like if you got 49% and if everybody failed but it was still the highest mark in the class it wouldn’t matter.

(Researcher) So as long as it’s the BEST fail?

(Laughter). If you failed and everybody else passed then you’d feel stink...

Sometimes you are really bad at something (like a computer game) but you just keep going and going because you want to fail with style!” (lines 475-486)

Fear of failure

In addition to the above example of turning failure into a triumph of style, the following comments reveal how concern over mistakes is perceived as debilitating for two of the girls:

The Terminator

“I don’t really like doing new stuff because it’s like ‘oh, my God, what if I can’t do it’ or what if I don’t like it and it’s not always just... I dunno... if

I'm trying something new it's 'can I do this, am I going to like it?' and until I find out what it's like I'm always 'Oh, I don't want to do this'.

Amber

"I kept trying different sports 'cos I'm not a particularly outgoing or sporty person and each time I've tried something, I've, at the beginning, I've been like "Oh no, what if I suck completely. Everybody's going to hate me for stuffing up the games and losing and stuff. I tried cricket last year and I can't bowl. I can stay in but I can't hit the ball and I've tried hockey and I was OK at that but I only did it for a little whileand I'm too scared to be competitive because I feel like I'll be letting everybody down if I can't actually do it." (lines 444-456)

These comments, although limited to just two of the girls, suggest that already a fear of failure is limiting the girls' willingness to try new things and to persist with activities in which they perform less than outstandingly. Amber's self-assessment is harsh and focuses on her feelings of incompetence and dread of letting others down.

A contrast is noted in the comments from another girl who said:

"I'm the complete opposite of [Amber]. I don't really think about those factors, I just take it step by step." (lines 460-461)

All-or-nothing thinking

Either-or, dichotomous thinking is seen in the view that performance must be perfect or it is worthless. One comment showed this extreme view in the following comment:

"And you put yourself down if you can't get it perfect" (line 384)

The same girl (Amber) shared an anecdotal example of how anything other than exceptional performance caused her to feel a failure:

"I don't like PE and up until last year I hated maths because I thought I sucked at it. I probably didn't, but I'd get more and more frustrated if I thought I couldn't do something. And I really wanted to quit or not go to school or miss out on maths" (lines 407-410)

I am my grades

When asked 'What would change for you if you stopped getting high grades?' the girls responded overwhelmingly that their self-worth and self-confidence would be seriously affected. The following excerpt is pertinent:

"It would be stink... some opportunities. Kids in streamed classes have different opportunities to kids from other classes.

(Researcher) Anything else?

I'd have to rethink what subjects I was going to take. If I did it once or a couple in a row then it would start making my life suck and I'd think I'd never get high grades again.

Like your self-esteem might change.

I'd start trying harder but if I stopped getting high grades in everything and everything I did didn't work I'd start lacking ambition and motivation and self-confidence. (overlap from another student "you'd just stop caring") And it would get worse and worse and worse until...

And my future career possibilities ... I wouldn't be able to do them anymore.

(They'd go down the drain).

(Researcher) George you said that you'd just stop caring anymore...

If you got all bad grades in all your subjects but I think it would affect me like that. I'd just think I can't do it so why try?.. I would try but you'd lack motivation." (lines 267-292)

Strong themes within this category are those of loss of opportunities, loss of self-esteem and motivation. These themes are supported by the data from the written questionnaire (table 6.4).

Getting it right –obsessing

When asked to define perfectionism, some of the girls mentioned the drive to keep at something 'until there are no faults at all, which is actually a bit tricky' (lines 323-324) and the need to control perfectionism or 'you'll keep obsessing over one thing and you can't continue on' (lines 381-382). Being able to know

when to stop is identified as an important distinction between the perfectionist and the non-perfectionist. One girl put it this way:

“Someone else (non-perfectionist) might do something and not be completely satisfied but just think ‘it’s OK’...” (lines 332-333).

Storm told an anecdote about another of the girls present (The Matrix) that was pertinent to this topic of ‘obsessing’. The Matrix gave implicit consent for the telling of the account by laughing and by focussing her attention on the storyteller. This account then triggers a parallel account from Amber who goes on to point out the never-ending nature of perfecting something.

“[The Matrix’] stuff always turns out really good ‘cos she’s really artistic but to get there she goes through every little step perfectly, like um her cake is like circles and one, I think it was the top one or the middle one was a bit higher than the top one and she was just worrying about it.

It was when I was trying to do a picture and I tried to do it a different way about 7 times.

(Researcher) What made you give up in the end?

I didn’t give up in the end. I thought this is as good as I’m going to get so I’ll have to stop or it will take forever.

(Researcher) Were you happy with it?

Sort of.

(Researcher) Do you think you could have made it better if you’d spend more time?

If I’d spent more time I probably would have ...

(Researcher) You could still be at it couldn’t you?

You keep going on things forever and forever!”(lines 340-363)

6.6 To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?

The goals of the workshop were earlier noted as getting to know one another, creating a safe and trusting environment, assessing girls' understanding of perfectionism and giftedness, and identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies. I will comment on the extent to which these goals were achieved.

6.6.1 *Getting to know one another*

The naming games were very effective if somewhat time consuming. As a result of the games, during the workshop I was able to call most of the girls by name. This made it easier for me to create an intimate culture in the workshop by drawing attention to workshop incidents and being able to personalise my references. Early opportunities in 'mistake making' arose in the games and I was able to model a healthy response to failure. This appeared to contribute to the boisterous, eager participation by the girls in all workshop activities.

6.6.2 *Creating a safe and trusting environment*

I noted many instances of willing self-disclosure in the conversation which, I suspect, would only occur if the girls felt safe and supported. This was particularly gratifying since Burns (1999) noted that perfectionists often have a disclosure phobia because of their fear of appearing foolish or inadequate. One of the girls commented in her diary that she occasionally tried to say something and was interrupted by other girls, so I will need to ensure that the most vocal in the group do not dominate conversations.

Initially, when talking about their gifted status, the girls were uncomfortable and made jokes to cover their embarrassment. Once feelings of embarrassment were over, the girls seemed to thoroughly enjoy talking about themselves and reflecting on their attitudes to learning. Diary comments were extremely positive and mentioned predominantly how enjoyable it was to be

asked such 'hard' searching questions which 'made me think – sort of analyse myself'. One girl (Storm) wrote in her diary:

"I really enjoyed this workshop. I think that talking to the other girls in the streamed classes helped me realize that there are other people out there like me. Also this workshop made me think about my attitude towards my grades."

And another girl (Jose) commented:

"I enjoyed this first session. Some of the questions were hard, but discussing them was fun."

These comments indicate that a safe environment existed in the workshop. Key to establishing such an environment were i) early opportunities to model acceptance of failure ii) game-playing activities and iii) opportunities for the girls to talk about themselves and issues that affect their happiness.

6.6.3 Assessing girls' understanding of perfectionism and giftedness

I was very impressed with the quality of the girls' reflection and thought on topics they had rarely if ever considered. I am confident that the quality of their contributions was based to some extent on the use of a written questionnaire prior to the group conversation. Comparing the two sources of data I can see that many girls shared opinions in the conversation they had previously written on the questionnaire. It is likely that even timid girls found it easier to contribute to the group because they had previously spent time reflecting on the issues.

Initially, I considered the written questionnaire a kind of primer to the real activity. The conversation was certainly the longest activity in the workshop and proved to be a rich and rewarding experience in terms of data collection, but it was from the written responses that I gleaned the most insight regarding prevalent views among all the girls.

At times, during the conversation, I wanted to pursue a topic with one or more girls, but was constrained from so doing by concern for the entire group. On the other hand, I noted that the group approach has strengths not evident in a more individualised format. Comments from some girls, who showed no signs of perfectionism at this stage, were delightfully controversial and introduced perspectives on learning and striving that are unlikely to ever have been considered by girls with perfectionistic tendencies.

6.6.4 Preliminary identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies

Already, I was gaining impressions about which of the girls exhibited perfectionistic tendencies. Prior to scoring the BPS, my attention was drawn to four of the girls, based on my observations and their written and spoken responses in the workshop.

Amber participated fully in discussions about perfectionism. She was quick to share anecdotes and to make personal application of the information discussed. Early in the workshop she worried out loud 'if we're not interesting enough, will you dump us from your study?' This remark may signal perfectionistic tendencies since it links acceptance by others with high performance. Sensitivity to being 'interesting enough' may flag high levels of self-criticism and identification of self with achievement. Amber's comments link self-esteem very strongly with high grades and demonstrate that she is quick to judge herself harshly if she fails to meet her exacting standards. Amber commented in her diary "[the workshop] made me think 'am I too perfectionistic?'".

George seemed slightly sullen and often made critical and self-deprecating comments, explaining that she didn't always understand the 'big words' that other people use. Signs of the 'Impostor Syndrome' were evident in her diary entry: "I felt a little bit stupid because everyone was saying all these smart sounding things and I was all quiet". When asked what might change if she

stopped getting high grades, she identified significant loss of self-worth and that she would 'just stop caring'. She was indecisive when choosing a pseudonym for her diary, and then when criticised for making a poor choice, she wanted to make a change.

Storm is a quiet, poised girl who gave highly reflective, considered answers to my questions. She was extremely reluctant to label herself as 'gifted', preferring to attribute her high marks to 'flukes'. She claimed to set her own high standards and to derive a sense of self-worth from her accomplishments. Her comment in her diary supported this observation: "I am not a very unsociable person but it is hard for me to make new friends, so all I really have are my grades, they are what keep me proud of myself".

The Matrix was a low-key contributor to this first workshop. She yielded often in conversation to more dominant speakers. It was her experience of 'obsessing' over an art project that was told to the group by another girl. The point of the story was that The Matrix is prone to fussing with details that most people don't notice. It was said of her that "her stuff always turns out really good 'cos she's really artistic, but to get there she goes through every little step perfectly." In her written comments she acknowledged that perfectionism helps her produce work of a high standard, but it can hinder because she is not happy with the end result, "it isn't as good as I want it to be".

These observations were preliminary and need to be treated as able to be disconfirmed by subsequent data sources. Scores from the BPS provided a second data source. They were scored later in my office after I had made my initial observations and debriefed the workshop experience with a colleague. The following table 6.7 shows scores for the 11 girls present and for two girls (Bob and Secret Squirrel) who began attending in Workshop Two. According

to scoring protocol, any participant scoring twenty or higher is classified as being a perfectionist. I will use the scores as part of the integrative approach to diagnosis; they will either support or disconfirm data from other sources. This will be considered in subsequent chapters dealing with the remaining five workshops.

6.7 After the workshop

Name (Pseudonym)	Score
Amber	28
Storm	22
Bob	22
The Terminator	20
The Matrix	20
Secret Squirrel	19
George	18
Jose	18
Yoda	16
Banana Hammock	14
The luck bear	14
Maria Favrina	12
Snagglepuss	11

Table 6.8: Scores for each participant on the Burns Perfectionism Scale

Two of the girls made comments (which were optional) on their BPS; they were Storm and Amber and their remarks were:

Amber "Very difficult questions. I know I am quite hard on myself so that I do better in everything I do."

Storm "I try to set realistic goals for myself, but if I don't achieve them I can't help but feel slightly dissatisfied with myself."

CHAPTER 7: *Workshop Two*

7.1 *Workshop Two: Purpose*

This session was extremely busy due to the inclusion of two activities there had not been time for during Workshop One. One aim was to continue the diagnostic process of identifying girls with perfectionistic tendencies. The BPS scores had identified five girls within the vulnerable range for perfectionism (table 6.7). My initial impression was that the scores seemed quite low and may not have picked up all those with perfectionistic tendencies. Consequently, I decided to administer an alternative perfectionism scale from Adderholdt and Goldberg (1999), which, although lacking validity data, includes test items referring to classes, teachers and tests which I thought more appropriate to the life and experience of the girls than the items on the BPS. The scale is self-assessed and allows for a graded diagnosis using easily understandable phrases (see Appendix F).

Another goal for this session was to raise girls' awareness of the costs of perfectionism by making a list of pros and cons. Burns (1980) says it is fruitless to begin work on treating perfectionism until the individual arrives at the conclusion that perfectionism is not to their advantage. This activity will also act as another energy-rich input likely to disturb and provoke the girls thinking. In this way, the process of perturbation (Kirk, 2000) is begun and along with it the possibility of personal growth.

A third goal for the session was to familiarise the girls with Gallwey's (2000) model for Sustainable Work (the PLE model). This model provides the rationale for the entire programme in that it demonstrates the need to broaden the perfectionist's world view from one that exclusively values perfect performance to one that balances high achievement in three areas of

Performance, Learning and Experience. The workshop activities would demonstrate how to value the neglected aspects of both experience and learning. Improv drama does this directly. The Pleasure-Predicting Sheet activity (Burns, 1999), which was introduced in this workshop, aims to disrupt girls' assumptions about the relationship between performance and experience.

A continuing goal for this workshop was to build a psychologically safe environment within which the girls could experience conditions conducive to personal growth. The improv drama games would welcome chaos and 'not knowing', both essential conditions if girls are to incorporate new learning in a developmental way. Creation of personal 'failure celebrations' is hoped to contribute to an environment of risk-taking and flexibility.

7.2 A description of Workshop Two

First to arrive on yet another chilly Friday morning, is a new girl and she chats briefly to the researcher about a mutual interest. She is handed a copy of the BPS to complete. As girls arrive a large boisterous group forms. Attendance is up with three girls coming along for the first time. Amber is absent. "She's sick!" someone calls out. The other two new girls seem quiet and more circumspect; however they follow the lead of the others, store their bags and stand around awaiting instructions.

Comment: I have an acquaintance with this girl outside of the research programme and I'm wondering how that will impact on our relationship in the workshop.

Everyone is called into a circle and the researcher explains that there will be some talking involved in today's workshop, but afterward there will be time to play improvisational games (improv). A warm-up activity is begun as a girl selects someone from across the circle, points at her and says "you!" The 'point' or the focus moves from one girl to the next and a pattern develops around the circle. They repeat the pattern cementing it in their memories. The researcher is part of the game – the 'point' comes back to her at the end of each pattern round the circle. She exhorts with "keep going", "do it again", "faster!" encouraging the girls to focus hard and to speed up. Some girls forget their place in the pattern and appear bewildered as they break the rhythm of the circle. Others help out with "you are supposed to point to [name of girl]". They improve - breakdowns in the momentum are few. An added challenge is introduced. Another pattern will be established and laid over the first. Girls groan with the prospect of increased difficulty. This time the researcher demonstrates throwing a 'koosh' ball to a girl across the circle (a different girl from the first pattern) and simultaneously calling out her name. As the girls try it out the 'koosh' ball is dropped, throws are wide of mark or too forceful. Progress is slow until finally a level of proficiency is reached and the researcher reintroduces the original pattern. They hesitate then pick up the pattern again and the researcher begins the 'Koosh' ball pattern over the top. Now the 'point' is being passed from girl to girl in one pattern and concurrently the 'koosh' ball is flung from girl to girl as their

names are called according to another pattern. Rhythms break down quickly so that one pattern is regularly lost. "Where's the 'point'?" calls the researcher, and "Who has it?" Girls jokingly blame one another and the game is restarted several times. The researcher calls an end amid protestations that the game is hard. Girls are now warm and some are puffing with exertion.

Comment: I am surprised at how much the girls are struggling to maintain the patterns. I have overlaid up to 3 patterns in other groups and had not expected the girls would find this low level task such a challenge. I wonder if the girls' uniforms are affecting their ability to remember individuals in the circle. A quick glance around the circle reveals a profound sense of sameness or anonymity among the girls.

They sit on benches, chairs and cube-like stage furniture to listen as the researcher explains why she is now giving them another quiz on perfectionism. "I think maybe this 'Quick Quiz' is more relevant to young people than the one we did last week. The words are more straightforward and the examples are drawn from school life." As they complete the quiz – pens having materialised from bags – some girls comment "Yeah, that other one was hard" and "These questions are easier to understand". Girls score their own quiz according to instructions on the form and are encouraged to locate themselves on the attached perfectionism continuum before they hand their forms to the researcher.

Comment: I'm hoping I didn't bias the girls' view of the BPS by my comments, but these observations seem to support my impression that the items on the BPS may not relate well to the experience of 14 yr olds.

Girls' attention is drawn to the whiteboard and they are invited to make a list of the pros and cons of perfectionism. As they share their views, they are copied onto the board. Suggestions come easily and in response to the researcher's probing, girls are keen to explore their opinions in more depth. The list of 'cons' builds quickly and someone complains "there are too many negatives! Let's think of more positives." The list in Table 7.1 is drawn up. Many of the comments reveal the personal toll exacted from the perfectionist: 'can be taken advantage of', 'feel bad if you are not as good as others', 'critical of self and others' and 'can't cooperate in groups'.

Comment: This remark likely reflects the dominant view among the girls, that perfectionism helps them achieve outstandingly. They are reluctant to condemn a perfectionistic style even when presented with an extensive list of disadvantages which they themselves have generated effortlessly. This would support an interpretation that the girls are not likely to be experiencing serious adverse consequences from perfectionistic thinking.

The researcher points to the comment about 'imbalance' and links this with a model for life-long learning. Before introducing the model, she tells the girls

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You try your best • It's better than apathy • You work to high standards • You do reliable work • You enjoy success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything takes longer • You procrastinate • You are taken advantage of/exploited • You find it hard to delegate or share the load • You experience work overload • You have unrealistic goals • You compare yourself with others then feel bad if you are not as good • You have an imbalance in life • You are dissatisfied • You are critical • You think 'it's my way or the highway' • It's difficult to cooperate in groups

Table 7.1: Girls' cost-benefit analysis of perfectionism

about the time she learned to fly light aircraft, to illustrate how success can depend on being able to do several things at once. She says "When I learnt to fly, I had to learn to do 3 things at once: aviate, navigate and communicate. If I failed to do any one of those things it would lead to disaster. In the same way, if we want to be successful at work or at school we need to balance 3 things: performance, learning and experience". The girls are attentive to the personal and they agree that learning and experience are sometimes traded-off for performance. The researcher explains that the workshops are designed to value the neglected aspects of learning and experience, so there should be plenty of failing and loads of fun. She likens 'fun' to the joyful play of puppies and kittens that leap about and perform for the sheer pleasure of doing. "It's called 'galumphing'" she tells them and they enjoy repeating the word. She encourages the girls to respond to failure by jumping up and trying again.

Comment: The girls have worked very hard to this point listening and reflecting on new information. Their attention is flagging and I'm conscious of the need to move them into some game activities. I don't feel the PLE model was adequately explained and I promise to bring a summary sheet next week.

Each girl is asked to make up a 'failure celebration' which will hopefully be used often. The researcher demonstrates her own version which involves leaping, waving of arms and joyous yelps of "I failed, I failed, I failed!" When asked to perform their celebrations all together, most of the girls need some encouragement and are a little reluctant to move or to call out loudly. One of the girls, George, leads the way with a raucous, energetic celebration.

Comment: George is an active member of a Drama and Theatresports group and therefore may be less inhibited than many of the girls. She commented in her diary for today that "the games were fun, but I might not be so willing to do them if I didn't do Drama".

The researcher warms-up the girls for Improvisational Drama by getting them to stride around the room pointing at objects and shouting loudly the wrong name for them. "Name what it's not!" she calls, "and remember to keep your eyes wide open!" Although the activity lasts just 30 seconds, several girls seem to be making a fairly token effort or not doing the activity at all. One girl gets encouragement from the researcher who walks with her and calls out words loudly. She is not persuaded to get involved. At the end, the girls are quizzed about the activity: "What was difficult about that?" Storm suggests "It's not rational. There is no purpose or meaning to it". And the girl who didn't participate (Cool Bananas) says "It's embarrassing".

Comment: I'm wondering at this point if I have pushed the new girls a little far. They weren't present at the very positive session last week which created a safe and supportive environment and they may now be feeling out of their depth. I'm also alerted to Cool Bananas' extreme self-consciousness and her reluctance to look foolish.

A circle game is begun which tests the girls' willingness to think 'on the spot'. Few seem to be taking the required 'leap of faith' into the middle of the circle to be interrogated by another player who demands "what are you doing?" without preplanning a response. Rather, they appear to know in advance what they are going to say. "Who is preplanning their responses?" asks the researcher. All but two put up their hands. One exception is George, and the other is The Terminator who has allowed herself to 'fail' several times by not having a scripted response ready. Each time this happens the group joins in her failure celebration. Asked why they were not thinking 'on the spot', the girls say they don't want to look stupid, or hold up the game. The researcher encourages them to try it out and the game is restarted. Failure celebrations are more frequent, laughter is plentiful, but some of the girls now seem hesitant to join in.

Comment: It is great to see The Terminator opening herself to the direction of the moment. She seems to be willing to think up something on the spot, rather than ensure a slick response by preplanning. At the same time, I'm a little concerned by her self-critical remarks about 'always mucking up'.

As the workshop runs out of time, the girls are handed Pleasure-Predicting Sheets and asked to fill them out for 3 activities during the week. They make notes in their diary before they grab chupa chups and scurry off to their first class for the day.

Comment: Once again, I have run out of time and my instructions about the PP Sheet are not adequate. I am realising that there is too much planned for each of these workshops. I should have waited to introduce this concept next week.

7.3 Plan for Workshop Two

What follows is an outline of the scheduled activities for Workshop Two.

- Warm up activities
Circle games are used to generate energy and focus.
 - i) Girls establish a pattern around the circle of pointing to another girl and saying 'you'. The pattern is maintained as the speed increases.
 - ii) A 'koosh' ball is introduced and girls throw the ball to someone in the circle simultaneously saying their name. Again, a pattern is created and maintained as speed increases.
- Quick Quiz – an alternative Perfectionism Scale to be administered. Girls score their tests themselves and locate their score on a perfectionism continuum.
- Cost-Benefit Analysis – brief discussion of perfectionism led by researcher. Girls come up with a list of pros and cons for perfectionism. Researcher writes list on whiteboard.
- Discussion of need for holistic measures of achievement. Gallwey's (2000) model for sustainable work is introduced (Appendix H) which balances Performance, Learning and Experience. Researcher uses personal illustration of needing to do 3 things at once when learning to fly light aircraft and highlights danger of making 'trade-offs'. Examples from girls experience are drawn out. Researcher underlines centrality of this model for the programme.
- Establish 'failure celebrations' – girls devise and choreograph their own failure celebration, along with researcher, then they are performed all together. Brief discussion of value of failing and the role of play (galumphing) in learning.
- Improvisational games
 - i) Naming what it's not (see Appendix E)
 - ii) Yes (see Appendix E)
 - iii) Freak Out (see Appendix E)
- Pleasure-Prediction Sheets – girls select 3 activities for the coming week that have the potential for personal growth. They predict how satisfying they will be from 0-100%. Homework during the week is to record how satisfying they actually WERE and how effectively they were performed.
- Diary entries – girls record any reactions to the workshop

Table 7.2: Workshop Two Plan

7.4 To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?

The goals of the workshop were earlier noted as raising girls awareness of the costs of perfectionism, familiarising the girls with Gallwey's (2000) Sustainable Work model, further building a psychologically safe environment, and continuing the diagnostic process of identifying girls with perfectionistic tendencies. I will comment on the extent to which these goals were achieved.

7.4.1 Raise girls' awareness of the costs of perfectionism

Performing a cost/benefit analysis of perfectionism was a fun activity and the girls were fully involved with contributions coming from many different girls in the group. They readily understood the concept of a balance sheet of pros and cons and at one stage complained that it was getting out of balance with "too many negatives!" One girl loudly encouraged the others to "think of more positives!" This was interesting, since it was clear that by far the easiest items to think of were the debilitating characteristics of perfectionism. I would suggest that the discomfort felt with a 'lop-sided' balance sheet was evidence that current understanding of perfectionism was being challenged and that perturbation had begun. The girls made it a game to come up with more advantages of perfectionism, and they seemed genuinely surprised at how difficult it was. As items were proposed, often an anecdote was shared so the conversation became rich and personally engaging.

While the girls were able to generate a comprehensive list of the costs of perfectionism, they were convinced that perfectionism helps them in significant ways. This suggests that the adverse consequences associated with perfectionism may not have reached a debilitating level in any of their cases.

I introduced further costs of perfectionism in the subsequent conversation about the PLE model, which will be considered next.

7.4.2 Familiarise girls with the PLE model

Providing a theoretical foundation for the programme is the PLE model of sustainable work (Gallwey, 2000). The model is in the form of a triangle, a separate element of work effort on each apex. Perfectionism is an imbalance in the three elements – valuing performance at the expense of learning and quality of experience - which results in unsustainable work effort. Unsustainable because performance exploits or uses up capacity, which may, if not renewed lead to ‘burn-out’. In a sustainable system, performance creates a need for learning which, in turn, generates new capacity. When the balance between these two interdependent elements is severely and consistently compromised, a person’s quality of life or experience is affected. Quality of experience, therefore, can function as a signal of healthy balance or of unsustainable imbalance.

I presented the girls with this model by linking it with a comment one girl had made about perfectionism being an ‘imbalance in life’. This led into a discussion of how and why we might value performance while trading-off experience and learning. I used my experience in learning to fly to show an application of the concept of balancing three important aspects of a complex piece of work. The girls seemed to enjoy my example and they listened attentively to my horror stories of possible flying disasters from failing to attend to all three tasks of ‘aviating’, ‘navigating’ and ‘communicating’ (see Appendix N).

The concept of ‘burn-out’ was a familiar one to the girls and this was a point they were quick to grasp as I explained the danger of not attending to capacity-building activities such as learning, risk-taking and making mistakes. As I tried to transfer the PLE understanding to the girls’ situation, I was conscious that they had been sitting absorbing information for a lengthy period and some were getting restless. They may have started to feel as if they were in a classroom and I wanted to dispel that notion because of possible

associations with assessment. My explanation and application was, therefore, simplified and abbreviated and I was not confident the girls understood the concept well. Certainly, I did not feel they would be able to make personal application at this stage. I realised that a handout summarising the model with examples of how it might apply to them would have been beneficial and I promised the girls I would provide one for next week.

Improvisational drama was introduced as an opportunity to explore the experience and learning elements of the PLE model. Striving for perfect performance is in fact, counterproductive during Improv. Some of the games targeted this striving directly and in the course of the game, efforts by the girls to pre-plan responses or to self-censor ideas were revealed. Particularly telling is the 'Naming what it's not' game, which confronts the girls' certainty of what they know and the unconsciousness of many of their habitual responses. Needless to say, this challenge is highly provocative and it is likely that some girls will try to reject the challenge in order to reduce dissonance created within their view of what is 'right' and 'logical'. Storm commented as we debriefed the game: 'it's not rational. There is no purpose or meaning to it' and in her diary she wrote that "the game we did, to me at first seemed illogical and a bit stupid, [but] then I saw the point to it and thought about it". I'm not sure what she considered to be the point to the game but I'm interested that she identified the lack of apparent 'logic' or 'purpose' as one of the challenges for her.

Some of the girls overcame their reluctance to embrace such a nonsense game and they participated whole-heartedly. Their ambivalence was captured in some diary entries:

Jose "The game was fun, but a bit tricky. At first I found the other game a bit weird, but I enjoyed it."

Secret Squirrel "The games were silly to start off with, but once you got into the spirit of them they were fun."

Bob “[this] was different because it was silly and adults don’t encourage teenagers to be silly.”

These reactions suggest also that the girls are unfamiliar with activities based on the ‘E’ or ‘L’ elements of PLE. I suspect their initial perception of the games as ‘silliness’ comes from their apparent lack of purpose and clear standards for measuring achievement. For the girls who could get beyond this hurdle, the experience proved to be very rewarding.

At the end of the workshop, the Pleasure-Predicting Sheet (PPS) was introduced and girls were asked to carry out the process on three activities during the week. The purpose of this activity was to explore the link between pleasure and the elements of the PLE model. At this stage I was intending to collate PPSs each week to analyse patterns of responding over the course of the programme, so it was important to get the data-gathering process underway. Due to time constraints –the bell for class had already rung - my directions were rather perfunctory and the goal of exploring the relationship between performance and experience was not clarified at this stage. Once again, time ran out and I concluded that there had been too much material in the workshop.

7.4.3 *Creating a safe psychological environment*

Girls were presented with some challenging ideas and games in the workshop so it was important that the environment was supportive of their efforts to take risks. To this end, the concept of a ‘failure celebration’ was introduced to be performed whenever a girl was stuck for words in a game or ‘failed’ in any other way. The spirit of the celebration is energetic and humorous and it reflects an acceptance of mistake making. Girls were a little reticent to try out their failure celebrations but I’m hopeful that as it becomes routine to accept rather than deny or hide failure, that the girls will be more demonstrative.

There are signs that some girls did not feel sufficiently safe during the workshop, for example the new girl (Cool Bananas) refused to participate in one game, citing it as 'embarrassing'. Yoda commented in her diary that she thought the games were pretty cool but she "didn't really feel confident enough to take part. I'm hoping I can take part next week." It is encouraging to see that, despite her shyness, she intends to come back.

The willingness of other girls to 'look silly' in front of the group demonstrated to some extent, the degree to which they felt safe within the workshop. And there were many opportunities for the girls to 'look silly' during all the session activities from the warm-up game to the other improv games. George reflected in her diary that "the games were fun, but I think I might not be so willing to do them if I didn't do Drama." Many of the girls commented in their diaries that they enjoyed the games and were looking forward to coming back next week. It was encouraging that one new girl (Bob) remarked "This seems like fun. It's not hard. I will come again next week. It's interesting."

7.4.4 Identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies

It was challenging for me to participate in the workshop activities and games as well as observe and make concurrent and meaningful notes. It was difficult to retain impressions of individuals after the games were over and to capture all the interesting comments made. In future a second person trained in observation and in improvisational drama might be usefully included in such a session. An alternative would be to video the session, but the intrusiveness of such a process may be too great a cost.

At the end of Workshop One I had been curious about possible perfectionistic thinking among four of the girls: they were, Amber, Storm, George and The Matrix. The BPS scores for three of them (Amber – 28, Storm – 22, and The Matrix – 20) confirmed that they were functioning within the perfectionistic range, which is any score of twenty or above. George's score of 18, while not

within the range of perfectionism, was quite high and I'll need to look for more data to either support or disconfirm her diagnosis. She had made the comment while filling out the scale "I never choose the extremes on these kinds of questionnaires" which may have artificially lowered her score. She may also be vulnerable to the influence of social desirability which results in her giving answers according to how she thinks she 'should' respond rather than how she really feels. This observation is based on her self-deprecating comments during the workshop and later in her diary, and also on her anxiety after being criticised by another girl for choosing a poor pseudonym.

The Terminator's BPS score of 20 also fell within the range of perfectionism and this would be consistent with many of her self-critical comments during the sessions.

BPS scores from two of the new girls to Workshop Two were obtained and added to the list in table 6.7. With a score of 19, Secret Squirrel is on the borderline of vulnerability to perfectionism, and a score of 22 places Bob within the range of perfectionism, at a similar level to Storm.

My initial reaction after scoring the girls' BPSs (minus scores from the two girls who started in Workshop Two) was concern that the instrument was not sensitive enough to measure schoolgirl perfectionism. I had the impression that scores did not seem to reflect the level of perfectionism I had observed in my interaction with the girls. Consequently, I decided to administer the 'Quick Quiz' by Adderholdt & Goldberg (1999) which is a self-test scale for perfectionism adapted for use in their book written for young people.

I compared scores on the Quick Quiz with the earlier scores on the BPS. Significantly, Amber, The Matrix and Storm once again scored within the range identified as perfectionistic (table 7.2). Amber is consistently highest on both scales; in this Quiz she scored 16 out of a possible 20 and falls within the

highest bracket on Adderholdt & Goldberg's (1999) perfectionism continuum which they label "Too Good to be True". Amber was absent from Workshop Two and her score was added after the third workshop.

Storm and The Matrix, with scores of five and four respectively, fell within the "Borderline Perfectionist" bracket. Storm made the comment in her diary: "I think the quiz was very true. According to it I am a borderline perfectionist, which is also how I feel".

George once again fell just short of the perfectionism range with a score of four which placed her in the "Healthy Pursuer of Excellence" bracket. She commented in her diary, "I felt the quiz we did was reasonably accurate. If I had've seen the list, I would've picked the category I got anyway. The game was fun, but I think I might not be so willing to do them if I didn't do Drama."

The Terminator had scored at the lowest end of vulnerability on the BPS and then went on to score within the "Healthy Pursuer of Excellence" bracket on the Quick Quiz. However, her diary comments suggest that she expected to score higher: "I liked the quiz, probably because my result didn't criticise me. I thought I was more of a perfectionist, sometimes people tell me I am too much of a perfectionist". Bob had scored within the range of perfectionism on the BPS, but her low score of one on the Quick Quiz does not support this.

Cool Bananas, who attended for the first time in Workshop Two, scored 13 on the Quick Quiz which placed her in the second to highest bracket of perfectionism, labelled "Too Good for Your Own Good". I did not manage to administer the Burns Scale to her during this busy workshop so I scheduled this for next week. I was anticipating a highly perfectionistic score based on this score and based on my observation of her reluctance during some of the Improv games.

Comparing scores on these two scales, therefore, confirmed my initial identification of Amber, Storm and the Matrix as having perfectionistic tendencies. George was scoring borderline for perfectionism, as were The Terminator and Secret Squirrel. Cool Bananas score on the Quick Quiz placed her in the highly vulnerable range, but this score will need to be supported further from BPS data next week. Her diary comment suggests that she was not happy with the result from the Quiz: "I am too perfectionistic apparently. I try too hard according to a worksheet I filled out!"

An unexpected response to the quiz this week came from Snagglepuss with a score of -5. She wrote in her diary: "I guess [my score] is okay but perhaps I should aim higher and actually finish what I start." I had not imagined that some girls would reflect on their attitudes as too 'laid back' and that the programme might encourage them to consider the benefits from more conscientious work effort.

Name (Pseudonym)	Score
Amber	16
Cool Bananas	13
The Matrix	6
Storm	5
George	4
Secret Squirrel	3
The Terminator	2
The Luck Bear	2
Bob	1
Banana Hammock	-1
Maria Favrina	-2
Jose	-2
Snagglepuss	-5
Yoda	-7

Table 7.3: Scores for each participant on the Quick Quiz (Adderholdt and Goldberg, 1999)

Final scores were referred to the following Perfectionism Continuum:

+15 to +20	Too Good to Be True
+10 to +14	Too Good for Your Own Good
+5 to +9	Borderline Perfectionist
+1 to +4	Healthy Pursuer of Excellence
0 + -5	You're Used to Hanging Loose
-6 to -10	A Little TOO Relaxed

CHAPTER 8: *Workshop Three*

8.1 **Workshop Three: Purpose**

This workshop was designed to use improvisational drama in a comprehensive way. In the previous two workshops the Improv activities have been rather hurried and fairly rudimentary, and I was conscious that some of the girls were anxious for us to devote more time to this. To recap, the Improv is used to encourage risk-taking, to celebrate mistake-making and to create a safe environment within which the girls can consider new ideas about perfectionism. My observations of the girls during Improv can also contribute to the identification of those with perfectionistic tendencies, since the challenges of Improv are the very ones that daunt perfectionists. *Chapter Five: Development of the Programme* expands on this link between Improv and perfectionism.

A further goal of the workshop was to challenge the perfectionistic belief that satisfaction is only possible when performance is outstanding. This involved the Pleasure-predicting sheets handed out last week.

In addition, it was hoped to review the PLE model to provide meaningful repetition, and because at least one girl was absent last week and has not been introduced to it. A summary sheet has been prepared as a handout for the girls.

A continuing goal of the workshops was to work towards an identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies. Workshop Three will provide mainly observational data along with girls' diary comments.

8.2: Description of Workshop Three

For the first time since the programme began, it is sunny as the girls gather for the Friday morning workshop. A small group is forming at the door rather than inside the Drama Room. A teacher and her drama pupils are milling around inside the room looking as though they are just about to begin a class. The researcher asks the teacher about her plans and it is revealed that the room has been double-booked. The teacher cannot leave because she needs the drama equipment and the props for students sitting an NCEA assessment. One of those students is Snagglepuss, who will have to miss the workshop today. The teacher is apologetic and offers her 'lovely big sunny room' for the Life-long Learning study group. A note is taped to the door for late-comers telling of the changed location. The researcher takes the key, promising to send a girl back with it, and is then guided by the girls out the door, through a wire fence, across a tennis court and up the wooden decking steps to the new room.

Comment: I am somewhat thrown by this unexpected hiccup in my plans. I feel annoyed that a booking system has failed and I'm a little reluctant to make alternative plans. It occurs to me that these responses are highly rigid and perfectionistic, and that this entirely ordinary administrative blunder will provide a valuable opportunity for me to model adaptability and flexibility to the demands of the moment. My willingness to accommodate the changed circumstances increases markedly.

The room seems very low-ceilinged compared to the vast Drama room and is full of rows of desks and chairs. It is, as promised, lovely, big and sunny. Girls find places for their bags and begin to stack up the desks on both sides of the room. A new girl has come along but the researcher explains that she has missed too much of the programme and it would be difficult for her to start now. She leaves. Some girls are chatting as they stand around in small groups. The researcher asks several times if the workshop can begin, mentioning the delay caused by the double-booking. The researcher mentally notes who is present as girls come over from the Drama Room in dribs and drabs. "Does anyone know if [name of girl] is coming today?" she asks anyone who is listening. Someone replies, "No, she's dropped out. She said it was too boring". The researcher asks how Amber is feeling this week. Not great apparently, and she explains that she suffers from mysterious stomach trouble. It is fifteen minutes into the workshop time before a start is made.

Comment: The girl who has dropped out is Cool Bananas who attended last week for the first time. She scored very highly on the Quick Quiz and I was anticipating a score on the BPS well within the range of perfectionism. Her reluctance to engage in the Improv activities last week and her critical reaction to her high score lead me to suspect that she is fact highly perfectionistic. It may be significant that she was not part of the initial session when the girls and I began to forge our relationship and to build trust. For her, the environment may have been too stressful, or 'boring' and she rejected the programme as irrelevant.

Girls sit in a circle on the floor while the researcher questions them about the PLE model from last week. A pile of two-page handouts, each decorated with a triangle on the front page, is dropped onto the floor in the middle of the circle and each of the girls snatch up a copy. Someone takes a copy for Snagglepuss who is absent. Girls answer questions about the PLE model and a summary emerges, but energy levels are high and the girls seem impatient to be up and doing something.

Comment: I'm conscious that the girls are wanting to get into the Improv and I still have some talking to do. This needs to be better balanced so the girls don't tire or lose interest.

At the researcher's request, girls bring out their Pleasure-predicting sheet from HW. Some pass them to the researcher and others seem to be filling in scores at the last minute. "Oh I forgot to do mine" from some, or "I haven't got my mark back for this test so I can't fill in the effectiveness score. Shall I hold on to it?" Responses from the researcher finally cover all eventualities and it appears that most girls have carried out the experiment during the week. The researcher asks "Would someone share with the group an example of an activity that was much more satisfying than you had expected it to be?" "I have one" from The Luck Bear. "I had this pile of wood to move – we live on a kind of farm. I'd been putting it off because I thought it would be really boring, but then I did it during the week and I actually quite liked it. It made me feel strong and capable." "And how well did you do? Was the wood stacked beautifully into neat rows?" asks the researcher. "Nuh! It was just a clump!" The girls laugh along with The Luck Bear at the image of her heaving wood into a messy clump and feeling satisfied with the physical accomplishment.

Comment: The Luck Bear is becoming an interesting model of non-perfectionistic thinking and behaviour. She is willing to contribute and will happily share even non-flattering experiences with the group if they are apt. Her perceptions and responses are often the most challenging and therefore the most useful for perfectionists in the group. 'It was just a clump!' becomes an often used phrase in the group when we wish to make fun of perfectionistic striving.

"Who else has an example of an activity that you enjoyed doing even though it wasn't done brilliantly?" asks the researcher. Storm shares her example of in-line hockey. She is new to the sport and isn't proficient as yet (she rates herself 60% effective) but she thoroughly enjoyed the practice at lunch-time and gives herself 90% for satisfaction. Secret Squirrel says that she loves to play the keyboard despite not being utterly brilliant.

New sheets are handed out and the girls are asked to repeat the experiment during the coming week. "Perfectionists believe that satisfaction comes only from exceptional performance" reiterates the researcher, "but we have proven that is not always the case".

Papers, pens and spare handouts are rapidly tidied away with the promise of Improv games. Energy levels are high and the girls are loud and boisterous. They begin with games which aid focus and concentration, rather than games that excite and enliven. Girls are told to walk quietly around the room, to stop only when the researcher does, and to begin again when she starts. Noise levels quieten and the focus of attention comes into the group activity rather than being dispersed in unfocussed conversation. As the girls walk, they now greet one another with a smile, then a handshake and finally, with a firm and confident "Yes!" The researcher assures the girls that this activity opens up possibilities, awakens curiosity and expands the world. The girls comply and the room resounds to affirmations of "yes!" Twenty seconds of "Naming what it's not" follow and the girls seem more confident this time, louder and less self-conscious.

Comment: I worry a little at this stage that the session is getting away from me. I have been struggling to keep the girls' attention and conversations are spontaneously starting up which are not always related to the workshop. They are happy and eager to be there so I need to quieten them and focus them on being in the moment of the workshop. I worry if by rejecting the role of 'teacher' I have lost some automatic control of the group.

Girls come back into a circle for the 'Clap Game' where focus, speed and preparedness to receive the 'clap' then to pass it on are the key to a fast, fluid game. A couple of girls gaze out the window during the game and lose focus so they are slow to pass on the 'clap'. The researcher talks about being 'in the moment' and how perfectionists fear the present moment. They are always taking themselves out of the moment, she says, by scrutinising their behaviour, by judging and trying to predict what will happen. She explains "When you are out of the moment, you stop listening and you stop being open to what is happening". The girls focus, the game speeds up and a 'yelp' is introduced to be passed along with the clap.

Comment: This example of the girls gazing off into space is a useful one at this stage. It gives an opportunity to explain the perfectionistic tendency of escaping the present moment. The slow responses from these girls disrupt the flow of the game so that the entire group feels the effect of being disengaged.

The next game - 'Eye Scream'- is all about responsiveness and commitment. On the count of three, all girls look up from the centre of the circle and stares directly at one other person. If they are being stared at by that person, both must scream loudly and drop out of the game. Numbers fall rapidly as girls drop out. Some are not making much noise when they scream. 'Zig, Zag, Zog' is the last circle game and it takes a bit of practice. A pattern of pointing as they say either 'zig', 'zag' or 'zog' is sent randomly around the circle. Initially the researcher demonstrates the game as 'Zig, Zog, Zag' and no one can remember the sequence. "Are you sure it isn't 'Zig, Zag, Zog'?" asks one girl. They try it out and everyone gets it. The researcher does her 'failure celebration' much to the amusement of all.

Comment: This is a priceless moment where I was able to really experience failure in the group. It couldn't have been planned, so I'm pleased it arose and I got the impression the girls were taken with its authenticity.

The last game is a 'Shared Story'. Five volunteers line up in front of the group and are given a title for a story. The first girl begins the story then, at the researcher's clap, she stops and the story is picked up by the next girl. Claps are randomly timed; some girls get two words in and others four or five sentences. The story title given is "*The day Heath Ledger came to Girl's High*". One girl in the line-up asks "Who is Heath Ledger?" There is much laughter as the girls explain how 'hot' this guy is. The story quickly becomes a competition as girls vie to be the focus of Heath's visit to the school. First he visits one streamed class - a clap - then he is bored and wanders into the second streamed class where he decides to stay - clap - until he notices the beautiful [name of girl] and so on... If a girl hesitates she is 'out' and must perform her failure celebration then sit back down. "Call out 'Die instead!'" the girls suggest. Quickly, this turns into the figurative 'death' of a girl for any reason the audience comes up with. Some of the girls have played a similar game before and they want to use the same rules. The researcher calls 'Die! For being too smart-alecky! Too much scientific stuff!' and Storm, the offender, must leave the story-telling group. "Do your failure celebration!" the researcher reminds her. "Make her die... hideously!" call the girls. "I know" says one, "the blender!!" and Storm must turn and twist torturously as

if she is blended to death! As girls 'die' to the screams and applause of the audience, they are replaced in the line and the story progresses.

When the researcher calls 'time', the girls beg one more game, just one more title... please! But the bell has rung and other girls are lining up outside ready for the next class in the lovely big sunny room. "Please make some comments in your diary" requests the researcher, as the girls pack up and prepare to leave. "Oh, and if anyone can help with the tables, that would be great".

Comment: This game obviously resembles some 'Die' game the girls have played before and they are unstoppable as they impose the 'Die' rules on this game. I decide to go with it because the impetus is huge and they are creating a terrifically energised activity. The 'Die' stipulation extends the challenge for the perfectionists in the group, and I notice Storm is somewhat reserved in her interpretation of a victim of a blender!

8.3 Workshop Three Plan

What follows is an outline of the scheduled activities for Workshop Three.

- Catch up testing with girls who have been absent:
Cool Bananas – BPS
Amber – Quick Quiz
 - PLE model is reviewed. Handout summarising the model is distributed. The 3 elements of the model are explained and applied to the girls' situation at school. Questions are used to draw out understanding:
What element(s) of the model are involved in an exam?
What element(s) of the model are involved in a voluntary drama class?
What is this programme?
 - Pleasure-predicting sheets. Everyone share one activity with the group where there was a significant difference between predicted and actual satisfaction or between actual satisfaction and effectiveness. 3 further activities are set for HW.
 - Improvisational games.
Warm up activities:
 - walking around room then stopping and starting only when facilitator gives the signal
 - walking around room smiling and shaking hands with anyone who is met
 - "Naming what it's not" (same as last workshop)
 Circle Games:
 - the 'clap game' (see Appendix E)
 - 'Eye scream' (see Appendix E)
 - 'Zig, Zag, Zog' (see Appendix E)
 'Shared Story' – girls tell a combined story in groups of 4 or 5.
Facilitator provides the title (see Appendix E)
'Questions Only' – (see Appendix E)
 - Diaries – girls respond to games and to workshop
- Postponed activities:*
- Improv games 'Give and Take' and 'Accepting Offers'

Table 8.1: Workshop Three Plan

8.4 To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?

The goals of the workshop were to explore improvisational drama more fully, to challenge the perfectionistic belief that satisfaction is directly related to perfect performance, to reinforce the PLE model and to contribute to the identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies. I will comment on the extent to which these goals were achieved.

8.4.1 Explore improvisational drama

Improv was extremely popular with the girls. Their enthusiastic response to the games was evidenced in their quickness to volunteer for games, to participate energetically and to suggest bloodthirsty changes to the rules. Noise levels were high throughout and some of the girls more familiar with Improv seemed to take the lead in volunteering and in interpreting my rules. At times they would begin a game before I had finished giving instructions which helped raise the energy levels but created a slightly domineering subgroup. In the 'buzz' of the games it is a challenge to both observe and encourage all girls to volunteer for games. At the end of the workshop I was concerned that I may have permitted two or three extremely keen girls to monopolize the games. I was reassured by diary comments that indicated a generally very positive response to the games:

- George "The games were great fun, except we didn't get to finish them"
 Jose "The games were really fun. I particularly like the story game"
 Yoda "I took part in all the games today except the last one. I think
 today's workshop has been the best so far"

In addition to providing a non-assessed fun activity for the girls, the Improv also created opportunities for them to take risks and to fail in public – performing their failure celebration as they did so. Some of the diary comments suggest that the girls appreciated being able to do this without fear of reprisals.

- Amber "Games: they were cool. I like my failure dance and it was fun
 doing it if I made a mistake"

Storm “It was lots of fun playing games and making mistakes”

The Terminator didn't find the failure celebration quite so enjoyable, and, despite her apparent willingness to take risks in front of the group, she makes the following remark in her diary:

“I found the games a challenge but fun. I have decided that I don't like the 'failure celebration'. It seems stupid but I know it's probably right”

A further diary comment from Amber shows an appreciation of the role of mistake-making and her growing awareness of the value of humour in coping with failure:

“I think I figured out why I get so much more nervous speaking a speech than performing a show. With speeches, it's definitely more obvious if you stuff up and you can't let out your nerves moving and acting like on stage. On stage a mistake can become an entertaining part of the show.”

This workshop was certainly the funniest and zaniest of the programme so far, and the use of humour seemed to spark wild creativity among some of the girls. Within an environment of fun and laughter, it was easy to identify and gently make fun of perfectionistic thinking. Failure was greeted with hilarity and collective celebration as the entire group relished each new opportunity to dictate the manner of someone's 'death'.

8.4.2 *Challenge perfectionistic belief*

A discussion was held drawing examples from the girls' homework experiment using the Pleasure-predicting sheet. Discrepancies between scores were noted to disconfirm the perfectionist's perception that an exclusive and causal relationship exists between perfect performance and satisfaction. Girls were able to come up with some examples of activities they had enjoyed despite mediocre performance. The Luck Bear's example of having enjoyed moving a woodpile was priceless because it anchored the conversation at a low end of activities that girls might expect to enjoy. Once again, the non-

perfectionistic contributions from the group, which seem extreme or bizarre to many of the girls, are the most paradigm-confronting or most effective at creating perturbation.

The reverse relationship was explored with examples of exceptional performance that did not result in satisfaction. One girl cooked tea to a high standard of excellence (80%) but received only 50% satisfaction. Another packed her bags for a holiday with a non-custodial parent (100% effective) but was only 5% satisfied or happy with the activity.

The conversation took place during the initial restless stage of the workshop when the girls were more interested in getting up and playing games. Consequently, I made a note that this illusory, perfectionistic relationship between performance and satisfaction needed to be repeatedly stressed in future workshops.

Some girls seemed to struggle with the task of assigning percentages to their level of performance and to their level of satisfaction. To help with this, The Matrix devised a ranking system which she wrote in the margin of her sheet. Percentages were listed in 10% intervals and were described in words such as '10% - Worst, terrible', '50% - okay', '60% - better than okay', '70% - fun' and '90% - really good'. Amber included a comment that she finds it difficult to judge or assess herself.

8.4.3 Reinforce the PLE model

The coloured handout was certainly an improvement in my presentation of this model to the girls. They were grateful and some commented that it would help them to explain it to their parents. Despite my reservations about last week's thoroughness, the girls seemed to have remembered the concepts well and were able to answer my direct questions about the difference between performance, learning and experience. They could also categorise different

activities according to their dominant focus. They were able to discern that the Improv games were going to stress quality of experience along with mistake making.

8.4.4 Identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies

Data from testing, observation and thematic interpretation of conversation had been combined to identify girls with perfectionistic tendencies. At this stage, Amber, Storm and The Matrix were showing up in many of the diagnostic categories. George, Secret Squirrel and The Terminator were exhibiting some perfectionistic tendencies and Bob's high BPS score needed more data before any conclusions could be drawn. Workshop Three contributed mainly observational data and diary entries to this task of identification.

Amber's Pleasure Predicting sheet provided examples of activities which were performed to an exceptional standard but didn't give her a correspondingly high level of satisfaction. One example was a test on which she received 90% but only recorded 50% satisfaction. Another was an assignment which received a 92% grade but provided her with only 70% satisfaction. These examples, while not enough to be representative, do indicate some reluctance and/or inability to savour success. A third example indicated a high level of satisfaction (99%) with in-line hockey practice even though performance was not great (89%) – and Amber added a superscription to the effect she finds it hard to judge herself at this. This issue of measurement is recurring among the comments of many of the girls.

Improv presents real challenges and risks to the perfectionist, so I was interested in how willingly Amber would participate. She had told me she belonged to an extra-curricular Drama Class and that she loved it. She was in fact, enthusiastic for the games and proved to be a willing volunteer. What was interesting was her tendency during the games to 'block'; this is an

Improv term which means to stop the action. Players can block in various ways, but it always has the same effect of not progressing the action. Amber tended to block by drawing on her extensive vocabulary when building improvised scenes and stories. She would throw an outrageous and little-used word into the scene, providing a new sense of direction, yet stopping the previous thread. A reluctance to be 'ordinary' by contributing a non-descript word or maybe by following the established direction is a characteristic of the perfectionist. I will need to be fairly cautious about reading too much into this because I have observed that high school 'theatresports' (a form of improvised drama) is of this sort, and Amber is familiar with these expectations.

Her diary comments indicate some surprise at the high level of perfectionism identified in her latest Quiz, and also a growing awareness of her intense self-criticism:

I don't think that being a perfectionist is a bad thing. I didn't know I was THAT perfectionistic. I think maybe I need to ease up a bit. I need to stop punishing myself for not getting everything right and accept that humans make stuff-ups.

Signs of perturbation or dissonance are evident in Amber's assertion that perfectionism isn't a bad thing, but on the other hand, maybe she needs to 'ease up a bit' and stop being so hard on herself and others.

Storm didn't show many discrepancies on her Pleasure-predicting sheet. One example was similar to Amber – they have both taken up in-line hockey recently - in that she enjoyed greatly a hockey practice session (90%) even though she was not very good at it (60%). They both speak of hockey with pride and are conscious that this is a determined effort to get involved in an activity outside of their schoolwork; in particular, it is a sport and neither of them is otherwise involved with sport.

Storm was a willing player in Improv although she seemed to prefer being caught up or assigned to the activity rather than volunteering. She was good-natured about her hideous death in the 'Shared Story' game, just stopping short of being fully committed to the drama involved. Storm has a naturally even pace to her movement and to her speech; she is reflective and thoughtful. Her contributions to the games were similarly precise and somewhat detailed. The energy level of the group seemed to keep her moving at a slightly faster pace than she was used to and she appeared to be happy with this. Her diary records that she enjoyed being able to make mistakes in the games.

The Matrix had constructed the scoring gradient for her Pleasure-predicting sheet and then had struggled to assign percentages for her three activities, none of which had merited over 50% for satisfaction. This may indicate some reluctance to acknowledge success, and/or harsh self-criticism. She was a willing Improv player, although it seemed clear by her rather bemused expression, that this was all very new to her.

George was an accomplished Improv player, knowing how to take initiative, yield to offers, provoke responses and advance the action. I am conscious that she is an experienced player, belonging to the school 'theatresports' team, and she remarked in her diary that she may not be so willing to get involved in the games if she did not do drama.

To this point, Banana Hammock has not scored within perfectionistic range. Her diary this week contained the following anecdote which is an example of procrastination based on fear or failure:

"I actually thought I was more of a perfectionist than my score said I was. This week I was meant to write a speech by Wednesday, if not earlier, but only just finished it last night (Thursday). Last year my speech was really good so I felt like it had to be even better this time so I kept putting it off

thinking than one day all of a sudden, I would just think of a really great speech. But, of course that didn't happen so it got left to the last minute and turned out quite crappy, so I wasn't properly prepared and was disappointed with how it went."

This instance, if it was not typical of her general behaviour, may illustrate a process of escalating expectations once a person has experienced success. It would seem that Banana Hammock is usually prepared and on time with her work; the added pressure of feeling that she had to exceed her last year's effort created a block to her efforts – procrastination – resulting in underachievement and dissatisfaction.

At this stage of the programme – midway through the sessions – I am reassured that Improv is working as an effective vehicle for exploring perfectionism, despite the challenges it poses for collecting data. I am energised by the girls' participation and aware that the programme is addressing a real need in this group. I am also becoming aware that the programme is functioning differently to how I had initially envisioned it would. Rather than 'cure' or 'treat' perfectionism among the girls, the programme is building girls' awareness of the need for sustainable learning, and in so doing is identifying perfectionism as an unsustainable and unproductive set of beliefs.

Workshop Four aims to progress this awareness following a similar structure to Workshop Three.

CHAPTER 9: *Workshop Four*

9.1 *Workshop Four: Purpose*

This workshop aimed to enable girls to explore underlying perfectionistic thinking in the areas of trying hard and receiving feedback. Improv games were the vehicle for challenging the drive to try hard at all things, since 'being ordinary' is one of the keys to success in spontaneous work. A guided group conversation was used to discuss issues relating to criticism and feedback.

In addition, I followed-up the Pleasure-predicting exercise to underline the illusory nature of the relationship between achievement and satisfaction. I hoped to enhance the girls' awareness of blocks to sustainable learning that may take the form of underlying beliefs and assumptions which they may not have had the opportunity to test.

Responses during the conversation along with observations during the session and diary entries were once again collated to help identify girls with perfectionistic tendencies.

9.2 A Description of Workshop Four

Amber arrives early at this morning's workshop. She seems preoccupied as she walks quickly into the room and then leaps up onto some upholstered chairs lined up against a wall. As she strides back and forth in her stocking feet she is agitated, speaking without looking at the researcher, but gesturing expressively. "I think I need counselling" she claims. "I'm seeing perfectionism in EVERYTHING!" The researcher walks up and down the row of chairs, following her and asking for details. "This programme is bringing lots of stuff up for me. I'm noticing everyone putting pressure on me and it's making me cranky. I've even withdrawn from a special project on falcons, which I thought I'd enjoy, but there's just so much to do... and I never give up on things." As they finish their conversation the rest of the group arrive and are asked if they know how to make an appointment with the counsellor. There is no awkwardness; some girls know and some don't but the necessary information is shared and the girls seem pleased to have the knowledge. There are no jokes or teasing about the possibility of going to a counsellor. Yoda and Maria Favrina are absent today.

Sitting in a circle the researcher asks "I'm wondering about perfectionism and how people respond to criticism. My daughter gave me some feedback about the way I ask people for favours – she said I give too many details, like I'm apologetic about asking for the favour. She said I should just ask and not go on and on. I didn't like getting that feedback, partly because it was true. How do you react to criticism?" This conversation follows:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Bob | Depends, [is it something] you want to change, or maybe you can't change it? |
| Amber | It's hard. |
| Secret Squirrel | I might be angry first, but then I think about it and maybe learn something about myself. |
| The Matrix | I hate when someone tells me something about myself that I already know. |

Comment: I am alarmed by the intensity of Amber's anxiety and relieved that I have briefed the school counsellor about this programme. This response would suggest that perturbation for Amber has reached some kind of crisis point and she is experiencing extreme discomfort as she attempts to reconcile conflicting beliefs about perfectionism and achievement and happiness. I feel it is important to affirm her decision to withdraw from the special project and to indicate that I will be available for her in the coming two-week mid-term break. I ask her to see me after the workshop. This seems a good time to reinforce the availability of the school counsellors to all the girls.

- The Luck Bear I ignore a lot of it, or I just celebrate my failures!!
- Storm Here's an example of how I react to criticism. I did an internet personality quiz and it gave me a really bad result. I didn't like what it said about me, so I decided it was a stupid quiz, but I kept redoing it until it gave me the result I wanted! (*general laughter*)
- Researcher What would you have done [Luck Bear] if the quiz had given you a bad result?
- Luck Bear Just said 'dumb quiz!'
- George Or, she'd have celebrated her failure! Like, "Yeah! [The quiz says] I like being naked!" and then she'd have told everyone about it.
- Terminator I hate when the person next to you sees your work and points out your faults – very fault-finding.
- George Like my messy room.
- Terminator You should see [George's] room – it's immaculate.
- George But my mum is really fussy and she's always telling me to tidy it. She's a 'clean freak'.

Comment: I am really pleased that Storm has shared this self-deprecating little story. She is visibly amused by her own behaviour and is comfortable with being lightly teased by the group. The vehicle of the group dialogue has provided an opportunity for her to step back and reflect on a recent event in order to make sense of it. And in the making sense she tests her assumptions and may be empowered to make different decisions in the future.

Comment: The benefits of having non-perfectionists in the group are many and this is one example of the power of their contribution. In this instance, it is a comment from George – who is at least vulnerable to perfectionism – about one of our non-perfectionists that provides an inspired moment of insight into the irrationality of perfectionistic thinking.

The researcher takes brief notes as the girls talk. "Aren't you going to tape us anymore?" asks The Terminator. Yes, the researcher plans to bring the tape recorder along next time to 'capture all your wonderful comments' and 'to keep the conversation on track' she says.

The researcher asks for the Pleasure-Predicting sheets from homework. As she collects them, she asks for a volunteer to share an example of a time she enjoyed something even when she didn't do it well. The Luck Bear mentions the extension class Zoo trip. "We had great fun, but it was a useless educational trip". "A group of us performed a dance at a [concert] recently" offers Snagglepuss, "and we got to dress up in big hats, capes, costumes and things. Everyone forgot all the steps – it was an utter MESS, but we had a

great time dressing up!" "Who doesn't think that sounds like a great time?" asks the researcher. Storm and The Matrix nod and agree it sounds more like a nightmare than a good time.

Improv begins with 'Questions Only'. It is a popular game and the girls are noisy in expectation as they line up in two teams. The game is a 'knock-out' competition between one member of each team as the pair attempts to converse only in questions. The first to make a statement or to hesitate is given 'Out!' by the researcher, and must retreat to the back of the line while performing her failure celebration. George and Banana Hammock are star performers and the game becomes a mission to get them out. Conversation settings change regularly as the researcher calls out 'after an exam!' then 'breaking up with a boyfriend!', 'at ante-natal class!' (someone asks 'what is that?') and lastly, 'playgroup!' A pair is stuck for words until George – looking into the arms of her opponent asks 'is that a boy or a girl?' Girls laugh loudly and the game goes on. The next time George comes into a scene she finds a humorous moment to reincorporate the same question, 'is that a boy or a girl?' This time girls are laughing hysterically, bending double and holding onto themselves.

A new game is introduced called 'My Word, Your Word'. After an introductory demo from the researcher and The Terminator, girls form pairs and walk around the room with arms linked, telling a story one word at a time. After a time the researcher asks 'What was that like for you?' 'Weird', 'Great', 'Didn't make sense' are some of the replies. They talk about giving and taking, offering and yielding and how stories don't progress when both people try to be clever and avoid being 'ordinary'. "Do it again, but this time I want you to try to outsmart the other person, outwit them and take all the interesting words. Don't follow their lead – create your own direction. Then tell me what it was like" directs the researcher. "Here's our one" offers Amber and Storm - who are working in a pair - "Dissecting openly upon fire frogs

Comment: I selected The Terminator as my demo partner because I wanted to provide a success story for her in front of the group. I was fairly confident we would be able to come up with a simple but effective story one word at-a-time. We did.

legs intestines!" "Yes" the researcher affirms, "that is a great example of neither person giving in to the other. And so no-one makes progress – they both block the action. When a pair works well together each person takes a turn; sometimes you get to contribute the exciting, zany word, but sometimes you need to be ordinary and say a word like 'the' or 'and' or 'in'".

Comment: It is interesting that Amber and Storm offer their example for comment. It is as if they are wanting to point out how well they have done it badly! Measurement and assessment seem very important to these high achieving girls.

In a circle, girls learn 'Give and Take' in which a movement is randomly initiated in random order by a girl then taken up by the rest as they become aware of it. The action in the circle becomes a dance of changing movements as girls respond and initiate. At times a movement goes unnoticed and is not taken up. At other times a casual scratch or hair twiddle is taken up by the group and becomes maximised, much to the amusement of the inadvertent instigator. At the suggestion of the researcher, girls chat about the challenges of Improv for perfectionists. They note how perfectionists would try to 'make it good' instead of just 'going with it'. Someone says that perfectionists won't want to say anything in Improv because no answer they every think of will be good enough. "They think too much" says one. At this, Amber confronts the researcher with her frustration: "I'm confused" she says, "I think I'm a perfectionist but I also think I'm good at drama. In fact, people tell me I'm good at it! And you're telling us that perfectionists aren't good at drama. So am I a perfectionist or not?" Amber gestures dramatically at the researcher and awaits an answer. Before the researcher replies, several girls offer Amber a perspective: "That's not what she's saying. It's not one or the other, and it doesn't apply to ALL perfectionists. They're all different".

Comment: This game is powerful for giving all players the experience of group acceptance of their ideas. It is wonderful to see the pleasure of the quieter students as their ideas – movements – are accepted and influence group action.

Comment: I'm very impressed with the willingness of the girls to confront Amber's all-or-nothing thinking. It seems to me that hearing this from her peers is more powerful than if I'd leapt to the defence of my own ideas.

The bell rings for class and the researcher signals an end to the workshop by placing the girls' diaries onto the floor and asking them to make an entry. Four of them do.

9.3 Plan for Workshop Four

What follows is an outline of the scheduled activities for Workshop Four.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group conversation on subject of criticism. Researcher shares anecdote about sensitivity to criticism and asks group for reaction. • Pleasure-Predicting sheets. Group examples are shared where an activity was enjoyable despite performance being mediocre or poor. New sheets are handed out for repetition of experiment during week. • Short written questionnaire – addresses issues relating to improvisation and perfectionism. • Improv games <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm up activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Freak Out' - 'Clap game' Games: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Questions Only' - 'My Word, Your Word' (see Appendix E) - 'Give and Take' (see Appendix E)
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Table 9.1: Workshop Four Plan

9.4 To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?

The goals of the workshop were to discuss healthy responses to criticism; to explore the Improv principle of 'not trying too hard' or of 'being ordinary'; to continue to challenge the perfectionistic belief that satisfaction is linked exclusively to perfect performance; and to progress the identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies. I will comment on the extent to which these goals were achieved.

9.4.1 Explore healthy responses to criticism

This goal was addressed in a researcher-led group conversation which was not taped, but for which I took detailed notes. The subject of criticism had not been explicitly part of my original programme but I had noticed my own

sensitivity to criticism from my daughter during the previous week and, as a 'recovering perfectionist', I identified this resistance to feedback as a potential obstacle to learning. I began the conversation with my personal anecdote and this seemed to stimulate much sharing of ideas. The dramatic and yet at times humorous contrast between a perfectionistic and a non-perfectionistic response to criticism was depicted well in the comments from Storm (detailed in Section 9.2) and from The Luck Bear (also in Section 9.2). On the one hand, Storm was so sensitive to what she perceived as negative feedback from a computer quiz, she redid the questions until it gave her the result she wanted. The Luck Bear said she would have just dismissed the result with 'dumb quiz!'

The conversation was effective in surfacing feelings and views about criticism and I believe the light-hearted style and relaxed manner contributed to this. In particular, it was rewarding to see some of the girls, especially Storm, sharing gently self-deprecating stories. To be of more benefit to the girls, this part of the programme may need to go beyond raising awareness to more specific modelling and role-playing useful responses to criticism. This could then progress to a homework exercise transferring the skills into a 'safe' domain or area of the girls' life.

9.4.2 *Explore the effects of 'trying too hard'*

Perfectionists avoid being 'ordinary' or 'average' and, therefore, they strive mightily in their efforts to excel. Improv drama relies on players taking turns to lead and to follow, to initiate and to respond. The yielding role is often too obvious or 'ordinary' to the perfectionist, and she may avoid it in favour of a more striking contribution to the dialogue which steals the focus and stops the action. This principle was explained as part of the debrief of the "My Word, Your Word" game, and then I spontaneously directed the girls to try the game again, but this time try to deliberately steal the focus by not saying what was obvious. While the girls enthusiastically complied, I worry that the

fun and pleasure involved in such a competitive version of the game rather eclipsed the purpose and the salutary lesson I had hoped for. The nonsense story shared by Amber and Storm well illustrated the lack of progress resulting from 'trying too hard'.

In subsequent games I often called out "stop being clever" and "be obvious" as the girls seemed to be striving for zaniness and entertainment value. While my coaching did seem to give them permission to say something they may have thought was 'too boring', I suspect more reinforcement would be needed to overcome their aversion to the ordinary. I took opportunities to point out that some of the funniest and most successful Improv moments resulted from their ordinariness, such as George's question "Is it a boy or a girl?" This subject of 'trying too hard' will be followed up in the next workshop.

9.4.3 *Challenge perfectionistic belief*

Girls shared several more examples of activities that challenged the perception that satisfaction was exclusively dependent on exceptional performance. Snagglepuss' example of the big dance 'mess' was particularly effective because it seemed to elicit real horror in some of the girls with perfectionistic tendencies. Snagglepuss related the story with genuine passion, so the other girls were able to see her delight in an activity they would have been embarrassed to be associated with.

Storm's Pleasure-predicting sheet this week gave an interesting example of an activity that she performed at a high standard but which gave her little or no satisfaction. She recorded an effectiveness score of 80% on a maths common test, but only 10% satisfaction for this grade. Considering most of Storm's measurements are between 70 and 100%, this is an extremely low mark for her. While 80% seems a good outcome for a test, she notes on the sheet - beside an arrow pointing at the 80 - "My WORST".

I am confident that the process of measuring satisfaction and effectiveness is awareness-raising for the girls, but I feel the sheets are now becoming more a data collection activity for me rather than a constructive activity for them. Some of the girls are complaining about filling them out so often. Others are finding it difficult to award themselves marks outside of a narrow range; restricting their marks for example, between 90 and 100%.

As a homework exercise, I asked the girls to notice when they did something just for fun during the coming holidays. It had to be something that was not assessed in any way so they couldn't strive for perfection.

9.4.4 Identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies

To further an accurate identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies, I added thematic analysis of the conversation, diaries and observation during the Improv activities to the data already gathered.

Amber is consistently coming to my attention with strongly perfectionistic thinking and behaviour. She began the workshop in an agitated state and attributed this specifically to her mulling over issues from the workshop. She readily refers to herself as a perfectionist and is now sensitised to seeing perfectionism in much of what she does each day. Her comments in the diary echo her agitated remarks at the beginning of the workshop:

“Thinking about all the stuff we do here and mulling over the issues brought up makes me get cranky at others. Over this week I have been very sensitive to tone of voice, people expecting things of me, and correcting or telling me off. Interesting thought-provoking stuff.”

She has drawn a sketch of herself in her diary looking anxious and miserable, and entitled it 'Cartoon of me worrying endlessly about our maths common test'. Then later she wrote her test score of 76% alongside the drawing.



Amber was a little prickly during this workshop which was consistent with her comment that all this 'stuff we do here' was making her cranky. Her exasperated question about how she could be a perfectionist and at the same time also like drama was an example of 'all-or-nothing thinking' which is a characteristic of perfectionism. She participated in the games with gusto, especially enjoying the 'My Word, Your Word' game with Storm. I talked with her a little more at the end of the session, took her phone number and asked that she call me if she wished at any time during the coming two-week school holiday.

Storm revealed sensitivity to criticism with her story of the internet personality quiz. In the telling of the story she became aware of how silly it was to manipulate the quiz to give her the result she wanted. She clearly enjoyed sharing her foible with the group. Storm hasn't made any diary entries since Workshop Three, and she later tells me it is because she finds writing to be a very personal medium. Apparently, she keeps a diary at home in which she writes without self-censoring, so she considers written work too personal to share.

The Terminator was one of the four to make a diary comment this week. She says "I think I did a bit better this time. I'm getting into this a bit more and doing the games a bit better". This comment seems self-critical given that the games are not assessed and the emphasis is on participation and enjoyment. Many of The Terminator's comments are related to judgment and self-criticism. In a treatment programme for perfectionists, Ferguson and Rodway (1994) identified self-criticism as "the most consistent/prevalent indicator of perfectionism in this study" (p. 300). In view of this, and her frequent comments that she 'should' do this or that, I still consider The Terminator vulnerable to perfectionism.

At this stage I am feeling a little anxious at the level of perturbation I have generated, particularly for Amber. I don't know her well enough to discern just how worried she is about these ideas. Her readiness to externalise her thoughts and reactions, often in fairly dramatic ways, means I can observe her 'mulling over the issues' quite directly. My suspicion is that while Amber is talking about her distress, she is dealing with it and accommodating new material into her old world view. I wanted to spend more time with her alone, especially in view of the two-week break before the next workshop, but this was difficult because of the group format and the rigid classroom times. I began to see that there would be benefits from a programme that combined both mixed group activities and individual work with each girl identified as perfectionistic.

It would appear that the workshops are succeeding in creating the environment needed for the girls to explore disturbing issues. As a facilitator I am experiencing the need for careful preparation and the need to trust the design of the process, the support mechanisms available to the girls, their own resilience and my own skills.

CHAPTER 10: *Workshop Five*

10.1 **Workshop Five: Purpose**

A four-week break separated this workshop from the previous one. Two of these weeks were school holiday and on the next scheduled Friday I was unwell. I awoke ill, so my husband took the message to the school and ensured a note was posted on the door to the Drama Room along with a bag of chupa chups. I had initially thought that the school holiday break in the programme would be a welcome period of reflection for me and the girls; but with the extra week off I worried now that this lengthy gap would result in a lot of forgetting and a drop off in attendance.

In the workshop, both Improv and conversation were used to explore the concept of 'sharing control' in group work. Perfectionists struggle with collaborative endeavours if they cannot guarantee the work will meet their own exacting standards. The Improv is designed to maximise benefits from group effort because it requires shared control.

In addition, this week girls were invited to identify specific domains in their lives that are affected by perfectionism. A conversation briefed them on the subject and then they completed a checklist, awarding one, two or three ticks to domains that are mildly, moderately or strongly affected by perfectionism. This also formed the basis for a homework experiment in 'lowering standards' based on a cognitive therapy technique by Burns (1999) which tests the perfectionistic belief "Without my perfectionism, I'd be nothing". In this way, we followed up work on 'trying too hard' from previous workshops. Further data from the conversation – which will be taped – was analysed for signs of perfectionistic tendencies among the girls.

10.2 A Description of Workshop Five

Girls are late to arrive at today's workshop. When the complete group finally arrives (after the conversation has begun) there are three girls absent: Bob, Maria Favrina and Jose. Immediately she arrives, Amber approaches the researcher and asks for her diary. "I've got lots of thoughts and I need to write them down" she says. "Are you going to ring me?" She sits quietly; scribbling in her diary even after the workshop has begun. The researcher is apologising to the girls for the missed workshop last week. Yes, they got the note and the chupa chups and no, they didn't mind.

Comment: I'm wondering again about the value of giving the girls their diaries to use between workshops. Time would be saved during sessions and comments would likely be more detailed and more timely.

The tape recorder is set up once again in the centre of the circle of chairs, cubes and benches. Girls gather around and are asked whether they did anything just for fun during the holiday break. "Can anyone remember what the term 'galumphing' means?" asks the researcher. "When you do something for no particular reason at all" replies one girl. A few girls share their experiences and the researcher directs the conversation to the subject of differing levels of perfectionism in various areas of life. She shares a personal example of one domain strongly affected by her own perfectionism – editing and revising written work.

Researcher	My husband and I are writing an article together and after making some of the last corrections, he rang me at home and asked should he sent it off or did I want a last look at it? What do you think I said [Storm]?
Storm	From your expression you wanted to look!
Researcher	That was my strong feeling because he often confuses 'their' with 'there' and what would the publishers think? ... then I stopped and thought "Is this my perfectionism talking?" and I said "Send the thing!" Who can identify with what I'm talking about? Yes, [The Matrix] ... you can. Why? What are you telling yourself?

Comment: The Matrix was nodding in agreement and smiling. If I hadn't seen her non-verbal response I would have missed the fact that she identified with this feeling. She tends to wait until invited to talk and I imagine would open up a little more in a one-to-one setting.

The Matrix	It might not be good enough. It depends on who you're working with. Someone like my brother I'll say "no, I'll have to check it".
Researcher	What would you have done [Storm?]
Storm	I would have wanted to check it myself because it depends on how much you can trust the other person.
Researcher	Otherwise, what's involved? What's at stake for you?
Storm	Your reputation I guess. Your own feeling of accomplishment.
Researcher	You too [Amber]. You'd have checked it?
Amber	Mmm. I see it with my sister as well. She does all these projects at primary school in groups and always ends up doing more than half the work herself instead of leaving things to others. Mum keeps saying that sometimes in these situations you need to just forget about it and leave it to the other people even if you don't get good marks.
Researcher	What's it like to hear that?
Amber	It's easy to say it, not to do it. I have to work very hard in graphics and in Drama -where we do group work- not to boss people around and try to do it my way. I'm always doing that unfortunately.

Comment: Amber recognises some perfectionistic tendencies in a younger sister. Taking on more than a fair share of the load is typical of the perfectionist, and Amber's mother appears to be addressing this with her girls by drawing their attention to the costs and benefits of such a strategy. Amber's remarks suggest that her mother recognises that some circumstances require flexibility with one's standards.

Comment: Amber's comments reveal a rapidly growing self-awareness and a continuing willingness to share this with others as she vocalises her reflections.

The conversation turns to procrastination – all the girls put their hands up to say they are procrastinators. "My German project was due last term and I STILL haven't handed it in!" from one girl. "As long as I start the night before [it's OK]" says Amber. "Everything I do is displacement activity!" from The Terminator. "When you are procrastinating" asks the researcher, "what are you telling yourself about the task you should be doing?" From one girl "It's too hard... you don't know how... it's boring". Amber suggests "It's just getting started I think". No one thinks it is a good learning strategy – they recognise that "the more you leave things the more pressure there is, and then

Comment: Amber asserted that although she procrastinates, she would never fail to meet a deadline. She seemed shocked that some girls would have such a 'cavalier' attitude toward handing in work.

you feel like you have to do it real fast". The researcher asks why, if it's not a good strategy, so many choose it? "Because you never have something really bad happen because of it" reflects Amber.

Comment: Amber seems to have identified the absence of truly adverse consequences to this perfectionistic strategy. She has gotten by using her 'last-minute' or 'just-in-time' strategies, but she can foresee that there may come a time when they will not suffice. Perhaps teachers could help by finding ways to ensure that students experience negative consequences to procrastination.

The researcher tells a story of how David Burns, a psychiatrist, tackled this problem of 'getting started'.

He began jogging around his neighbourhood streets and found he couldn't run far without stopping to walk as there are hills in all directions from his driveway. He was discouraged with his progress so he tried something different. Instead of raising his standards each day, he lowered them. Each day he made it his aim to run a little less far than the day before. The effect of this was that he could always accomplish his goal so he would feel good and be spurred on farther.

"He can do more because he's not trying to!" concludes one girl after the story ends. "And then you feel good because you've done more than you had to" adds another girl." The researcher reassures the girls that 'lowering your standards' is not about lowering the quality of their work. Rather, it is more likely that they will perform outstandingly if they aim to be average. She tells them "because of your immensely high expectations, sometimes you have to kind of trick yourself – it's like you have dumped a big fat toad [of expectation] on top of you and you can't see your way out from under it.... lift it off by setting an easily achievable standard". There is a noise like an explosion from some of the girls in the circle, then laughter and pointing at The Luck Bear. The researcher asks what happened. The Luck Bear demonstrates how she 'shot the toad off her shoulders!' The group enjoys the drama and light-heartedness of the moment. The researcher pursues the issue of 'trying hard' and generates the following conversation:

Comment: I'm hugely impressed by the girls' ability to extract the principles in the story. I've been conscious of the cognitive challenge in much of the programme material and consider it would be too difficult for a group of younger girls or girls of significantly lesser ability.

Comment: This is a truly inspired moment. The Luck Bear once again demonstrates in a concrete and humorous way her non-perfectionistic style. We adopt her gesture of 'shooting the toad off our shoulders' to depict overcoming perfectionism.

Researcher	Some people feel that the toad is justified in some way [that it should be there]. Our thinking is not as healthy as yours.
The Luck Bear	I have healthy thinking?

- Researcher Absolutely. Some perfectionists feel that the toad-like burden of their perfectionism is a sign that they're working hard, that they're suffering as they should be and if they're feeling under pressure then they're doing what is right. You're nodding [Storm]?
- Storm I always feel like that. I always work so hard...I feel that I'm working harder and achieving my goals when I'm under pressure to do it. Because when I'm not under pressure I keep thinking 'oh, it doesn't matter, it's OK if I don't do it'.
- Researcher So that feeling of being bowed down, of being under pressure...it feels good? It feels normal?
- Storm Yeah.
- George I hate that feeling, it's nagging at you...eating away at you...like 'Do it, do it, do it'.
- ...
- Storm I remember reading somewhere about Girls' High (before I came into 3rd form) that you have an hour and a half of homework a night. I went home and I only could do 20 minutes and that finishing everything I could, and I thought 'that's weird, am I not getting enough work load or am I just doing everything really badly?' It was weird for me. I didn't know what was happening. I was expecting a lot more and when I didn't get it I felt strange...like...
- Researcher ...like you weren't working hard enough?
- Storm Yeah.
- Amber I had the exact opposite of that. I took way more time than everybody else to do things and I was thinking 'what's wrong with me, am I slow or am I thick? Am I not doing it fast enough?'
- Researcher My friend has a son in 3rd form... he is sometimes up until midnight doing his homework...rubbing things out, starting things again.
- The Matrix Been there, done that.

Comment: This is the second time Storm has remarked that she works better under pressure. This reflects the perfectionistic belief "I'd be nothing without my perfectionism." Interestingly, her earlier comment in the workshop (not included in transcript) was that she panicked about an approaching deadline and worked really hard to meet it. She said her work turned out OK but it could have been better if she'd started earlier. Yet, in the same sentence she claimed that extreme pressure makes her work better.

Comment: Feeling stretched in this way is characteristic of perfectionistic striving and is one reason why perfectionists may not give up a punishing behaviour even when they are suffering adverse consequences. Those consequences are interpreted as noble striving toward excellence.

Comment: While George doesn't embrace perfectionistic striving she speaks from her experience here. She adopts a nagging, insistent, even threatening tone as she becomes the voice of her perfectionism.

Comment: Storm is quick to blame herself for the incongruity in expectation and reality.

Comment: Evaluating oneself alongside fellow students is fairly common, but here Amber is highly self-critical.

The researcher hands out a checklist of areas that may be variously affected by perfectionism. She instructs about how to fill it out. Amber states "Everything! Everything is affected... I've been noticing lately that everything I do is affected by perfectionism. It's driving me nuts" "How can eating be affected by perfectionism?" someone asks. "Like if you can't mix your food and stuff" suggests another. The girls fill out the checklist and make plans to carry out an experiment during the week on an area mildly affected by perfectionism. They will compare their experience of an activity; firstly, when they let perfectionism rule their behaviour and secondly, when they place limits on their perfectionism. Some examples are given of how they might put limits on perfectionism in 'appearance' and in 'handing in assignments'. Amber adds four extra domains affected by perfectionism to her checklist. Some of the non-perfectionists suggest that their task will be to RAISE standards in an activity!

Comment: This activity really needs some one-on-one time with girls who have perfectionistic tendencies. The girls needed more help setting their goals and identifying ways of limiting perfectionism in various activities. I gave them my email address and phone number and encouraged any to call me if they were confused. None did. And the activity had little relevance for the non-perfectionistic girls.

Sheets of paper along with pens are abandoned noisily, chairs are thrown back and chatter begins as the researcher announces it is time for Improv. 'Questions Only' has a variation this time – one player throws a small foam cube to the other who must begin a question using the word printed on the up-facing facet. Words like 'who', 'why', 'where' and 'how' are printed on the six facets of the cube. Some girls seem liberated by the addition of the cube and become fluent and decisive in their contributions; others become more indecisive and they spin the cube looking for a 'better' option than the one presented.

Comment: At this stage the entire group is aware of who are perfectionistic and who are not.

The next game is called 'Accepting Offers' and girls play in pairs. The first pair is given a starting sentence and demonstrates in front of the group. The phrase "Is this mine or yours?" is taken up by one player and a scene is built as the pair responds to one another. The researcher claps and the pair freezes. "Now begin a new scene using your current position as the 'offer'". The girls seem competitive and vie for control of their scenes. Offers are blocked rather

than accepted so that scenes become bogged-down and falter. The researcher demonstrates acceptance of offers by building a simple scene with one of the girls. "Now I'd like you to play the game again. And this time you can only say 'yes' to ideas and offers from your partner. Notice how this advances the scene".

Comment: I'm constantly urging the girls to 'be obvious' and 'don't try to win' but their natural tendency is to outshine the other player or to put her on the spot. I remind them that a key to successful Improv is to 'make the other person look good'.

The last game is 'Space Jump' where a different scene is built with one, two, three and then four players. At a 'clap' from the researcher the players freeze, another player enters and a new scene is built. Once the number of players reaches four, the game moves back through the scenes shedding players in the order they entered until just the original player is left. Some fun moments are had as new positions must be incorporated and justified within previously established scenes. The bell rings before there is time for everyone to have a turn at this challenging game. Someone reminds the researcher that next Friday is part of the college's centennial celebrations and no one will be at school. "We may have to hold the last workshop during class-time" says the researcher. "During MATHS!" suggests one girl. "We all have a maths test early in the week so then we could miss it". The researcher says she will arrange an alternative time – hopefully during Maths class – and will let them know via the morning notices.

Comment: I am aware of a conflict in my roles. On the one hand I want to provide a non-assessed accepting experience of fun and play – galumphing if you like. At the same time, I know that the experience of being coached and instructed in Improv techniques can shed light on perfectionistic tendencies. I just don't want to create in the girls perfectionistic striving to excel at the Improv activities.

10.3 Plan for Workshop Five

What follows is an outline of the scheduled activities for Workshop Five.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group conversation on homework exercise of doing something purely for pleasure – ‘galumphing’ and on ‘sharing control’. Conversation is taped with girls’ permission. Researcher introduces idea of testing out perfectionistic belief “I’d be nothing without my perfectionism”. Explanation is given of an experiment in altering standards in various activities to see how performance is affected. Researcher uses example of David Burns (1999) successfully learning to jog by ‘daring to be average’. • “What is affected by perfectionism?” checklist is handed out (see Appendix I). Girls assign one, two or three ticks to each domain listed based on how strongly it is affected by perfectionism. Researcher gives instructions about selecting one domain mildly affected by perfectionism and observing the effect on performance of low and high standards. Instruction sheet is handed out (see appendix I). • Improv Games: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ‘Questions Only - ‘Accepting Offers’ - ‘Space Jump’ (see Appendix E)

Table 10.1: Workshop Five Plan

10.4 To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?

The goals of the workshop were to explore the concept of ‘shared control’; to identify domains of life variously affected by perfectionism, and to subsequently design a personal experiment challenging the perfectionistic belief “Without my perfectionism I’d be nothing”; and finally, to contribute observational and conversational data to the process of identifying girls with

perfectionistic tendencies. I will comment on the extent to which these goals were achieved.

10.4.1 Explore concept of 'shared control'

Two activities were specifically designed to address the issue of sharing control in collaborative work. Firstly, I intended to bring the subject up in the group conversation and secondly, I planned Improv activities that required turn-taking of the 'initiate' and 'follow' roles.

As it turned out, it was not necessary to directly bring up the topic of control because my anecdote about needing to check and double-check written work, while highlighting a domain of my life affected by perfectionism, also provoked comment about working with others and how much you could 'trust them' to adhere to your standards. There was general agreement that perfectionists find group work difficult and that many of them take on far more than a fair share of the work load. Amber identified a potential adverse consequence from this unwillingness to share control; she noted that her behaviour in groups is sometimes 'bossy' and she has to try hard not to impose her standards on others. The conversation occurred naturally and contributions came readily from Storm, Amber and The Matrix – all of whom have demonstrated perfectionistic tendencies to varying degrees.

To improve the likelihood of this learning being transferred to real life situations, and to maximise the learning by the group, I would recommend the use of role-play based on situations that come up in conversation. Psychodramatic techniques might be usefully applied to create a kind of reflection-in-action scenario for the girls (Ringer, 2002). Girls would take the roles of the main players in a chosen event and as they enact the scene, others would help to make meaning of their words and actions. At times, others might become auxiliary actors in the scene, or they might mirror the words or feelings of the main actor(s). In this way concrete experience occurs

simultaneously with reflection and feeling. This would surface underlying assumptions that direct perfectionistic behaviour and would test them out in a group forum of differing viewpoints where group members provide mirroring for others. In this way, learning about themselves could come from self, others, the group and the researcher. The likely benefits from such group work provide more evidence that the decision to include both perfectionistic and non-perfectionistic girls in the programme has been a good one. The Luck Bear continues to delight and amaze with her fresh, unencumbered perspective which provides a clear 'mirror' to the perfectionistic girls in the group.

The chosen Improv activities for this workshop relied on shared control and, interestingly, the girls demonstrated a conspicuous reluctance to share control today. I think the combative or competitive nature of school 'theatresports' has influenced strongly their expectations of improvised drama. They treat Improv as a competitive sport or gladiatorial entertainment rather than a collaborative effort. I suspect too that these high-achieving girls are keen to shine publicly and the most obvious way to do that is to draw attention to oneself with humour or comments that put the other person down. It is likely that this behaviour is habitual or reflexive rather than consciously chosen at the time. The consequence was that during the Improv session, I needed to redesign some of the games to ensure the girls would experience sharing control and yielding to the other person. It was at this stage that I worried my role was becoming an instructor and assessor of their 'play', whereas I intended only to facilitate and coach. Future plans will need to anticipate the competitive striving of the girls in this setting and begin with more fundamental games that embed the basic principles of offer and yield.

10.4.2 Challenge perfectionistic belief 'Without my perfectionism I'd be nothing'.

The group conversation covered the concept of 'perfectionistic striving' within the subject of procrastination and 'trying hard'. The story of the jogger,

who observed improvements in his performance when he set progressively lower goals for himself, was effective in demonstrating how excessive tension is debilitating. Several girls spontaneously gave their interpretation of the learning from the story as 'he can do more because he's not trying to!'

The metaphor of the 'big fat toad on your shoulders' was thought up on the spot and seemed to work well in two ways; the girls were revolted rather than inspired by the image of a massive work load; and it provoked The Luck Bear to demonstrate dramatically how she'd just shoot it right off her shoulders if it tried to sit on her.

All three girls thus far identified with perfectionistic tendencies (The Matrix, Storm and Amber) took the opportunity in this conversation to share their feelings that self-worth and self-respect come from working under pressure. Storm acknowledged that being under pressure and bowed down felt normal and good to her, but she also conceded that she would likely do better work if she was able to begin projects earlier and complete them at a more leisurely pace.

The checklist enabled girls to think more specifically about domains of their life that may be variously influenced by perfectionism. An unintended and useful consequence of having the girls fill it out together was the number of questions they asked one another to clarify their understanding of perfectionism. Mostly, it was other girls who answered their questions, and I was fascinated to hear their current thinking on the subject. While the exercise was beneficial, and set up an experiment for the coming week, in the future I would not use it with all girls in the group. It was here that I felt the non-perfectionists were not engaged sufficiently in the workshop. While they were encouraged to do the experiment also, in fact it was largely irrelevant for many of them. Individual sessions to complement the group work at this stage would provide the best configuration for a future programme. As a

consequence of lack of time and my perception that there was a lack of interest from the non-perfectionists, I rushed the instructions for the homework experiment and left the girls feeling less than clear about what I was expecting from them.

10.4.3 Identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies

I was looking forward to collecting more data on Bob this week, because I am still uncertain about her level of perfectionism. The earlier score on the BPS was within perfectionistic range, but I have not managed to support this with much observational data. Diary entries have not yielded much information; in fact Bob stopped recording her impressions after the third workshop. It was my impression that Bob worked at a measured pace and I may have rushed her through many of the activities, leaving her little if any time to make thoughtful diary entries. It may be also that since Bob is quiet in groups, she is not initiating many remarks that come to my attention. The seeming invisibility of Bob is another reason for recommending some one-to-one time with girls in future programmes.

Amber continues to explore her perfectionism with some intensity. Her dedication to self-examination is heartening, and yet I'm conscious that there is the potential for her to bring her perfectionistic thinking and strategies to bear on her own perfectionism as if it was her next challenging project. I need to ensure that she doesn't begin to view herself as the perfect perfectionist! Already, some of her observations are manifestations of all-or-nothing thinking; such as, "I'm always bossing people around" and "Everything I do is affected by perfectionism". Amber was the only girl to make a diary entry this week and in it she summarises her heightened awareness of perfectionism and the resulting conflicts for her:

I have decided I am a full-blown perfectionist. I have been noticing perfectionism in everything I do and am associated with. I expect others and things to be perfect too. I expect myself to keep striving for

perfection in my religion (Christianity) and my personality (controlling my temper). In in-line hockey I want/expected for us to play fair and when we didn't come up to my standard of fairness I got uptight and tried to make it fair and ended up swearing (which I almost NEVER do) and walking out. I'm sure it wasn't entirely my fault but it made a big thing! But it can be good to strive for better but not everything!

I recently discovered a composing program called Noteworthy and it uses a feeling of perfect rather than right or wrong. Creativity is judged by yourself. Even doing the dishes is perfectionistic. Is this ruining my life or just mildly bothering?

Amber's final question to herself is fascinating. She is attempting to determine the role of perfectionism in her life. At the least, it would appear that she finds it 'mildly bothering', and she seems determined to continue her search for an answer. She has obviously continued to mull over the workshop ideas during the previous weeks and she has noticed a variation on the definition of 'perfect' which appeals to her because it is not so judgmentally right or wrong.

Storm's comments from today's conversation reveal a strong commitment to 'perfectionistic striving' in her work. She claims to feel better when working under pressure, as if it is a sign that she is working hard on the right things. When she is not working as hard as she thinks she 'should' be working, she feels 'weird' and 'strange'. Her comments also suggest a reluctance to share control in group work. Storm admits to having problems trusting others to do an acceptable job on work with which she is associated.

The Matrix was once again a fairly quiet participant in the workshop, but several comments reveal perfectionistic thinking. Firstly, she nodded to say she identified with my dilemma in the 're-checking written work' story. When asked to explain, she said that she would worry the work would not be good

enough, but that it would depend on who you're working with. Later in the workshop, after I had told another brief anecdote about a friend's son who stays up until past midnight to finish his homework and make it look good, she commented "Been there, done that". I suspect that more one-to-one time in the programme would allow The Matrix to share more of her thinking and her experiences; since, in the larger group she tends to let others dominate.

With one workshop remaining in the programme, I feel I am reaching a point where I have a realistic view of the process. I can see the impact it is having on the girls; both their enjoyment of the process and the perfectionistic perturbation many of them are experiencing. At the same time I am detecting numerous ways the programme could be enhanced for future groups.

CHAPTER 11: *Workshop Six*

11.1 **Workshop Six: Purpose**

This final workshop drew together many of the activities from the previous five sessions and embedded them within a systems understanding of perfectionism (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.1). A guided group conversation allowed the researcher to give brief explanations of concepts and also to draw out personal insights and observations from the girls. Girls re-took the BPS and discussed any perceived changes in their responses. Along with this, I formed some conclusions about the identity of girls with perfectionistic tendencies in the group. Finally, I gained consent from two of the girls for a follow-up interview, as well as arranging to follow-up with all the girls next year.

In addition to these research-driven objectives, I intended to spend some time expressing my appreciation to the girls for their dedication and their generosity over the six weeks. I wanted to tell them this directly of course, but I planned to bake a sensational chocolate cake for them with a joke in the icing about perfectionism. The non-perfectionistic girls in particular, have been selfless in their attendance – in view of the fact that we probably spent more time ‘conversing’ than they had hoped when they agreed to join.

11.2 A Description of Workshop Six

It is a warm bright day for the last workshop of the programme; a clash with Centennial celebrations has resulted in its being held on a Thursday at noon rather than the early Friday morning slot. So the girls are arriving during class time – Maths class – and they will spend the last period before lunch in the workshop. Maria Favrina is absent for the third time in a row, and Jose doesn't make it to this final session so, the final group consists of eleven girls.

Comment: Maria Favrina attended the first 3 workshops then we didn't see her again. She was not perfectionistic according to any of the test scores and any of my observations. Jose phoned the night before to tell me she would be tied up with Centennial celebrations today.

The room is buzzing with excitement around completing the programme, and possibly with the thrill of getting out of maths. The girls are promised a slice of chocolate cake - with 'real' icing - at the end of the session. Some sneak a look at the cake which is sitting in a large cardboard box. It is circular – thickly covered with chocolate ganache icing, and decorated with an iced stick figure of a girl encircled by the word 'PERFECKT'.

The girls form a conversation circle around the tiny microphone where each of them is handed a copy of the Burns Perfectionism Scale. "Please fill these out again" instructs the researcher. This time the girls talk as they complete the scale – comments like 'I feel different this time' and 'I'm giving different answers today' and even 'You've turned me into a perfectionist'. 'Let's talk about your reactions to doing the BPS again' suggests the researcher, and the girls move easily into a discussion about the experience:

- George My answers were really different this time. Maybe because I don't know the answers to any of these so I'm just making them up.
- Researcher Are you saying that on the day you feel a little different?
- George One day they could be this and then maybe something's changed since last time.
- Researcher What would be really interesting would be to compare scores...
- George Maybe I'm in a positive mood because I've got more positive ones than last time.

Comment: Actually, George's score today was slightly higher this time than her first measurement.

Amber	The other thing is we actually know what the score is...
Researcher	You know how to score so you're more sophisticated about the test?
Amber	Yeah
The Matrix	I'm just not thinking about my responses today... I can't explain.
Researcher	Did you respond more intuitively today than before?
The Matrix	I'm just not sure what I think most of the time.
George	Me too.
Bob	Because you can't think about thinking! (General laughter)
Amber	It's all depending.

"This is hard" affirms the researcher; "It's hard because your underlying beliefs are often invisible to you. Maybe fourteen year-olds aren't often confronted with these kinds of questions?" "Everyone thinks we're too immature to answer these questions properly so no-one even bothers" complains The Terminator, "They just say, 'Oh, kids!'"

Comment: The Terminator has voiced a feeling that I believe is true of many girls in the group – that they are flattered by the researcher's attention and interest in their opinions.

The researcher stresses how important it is to examine one's attitudes to learning. Learning has to be sustainable and some of the girls have an intensity about the work they do – she mentions Amber, Storm and The Matrix – that may result in burn-out if that intensity is carried into everything they do. No one disagrees with the researcher's conclusion when the three are singled out in this way. "This is a good time to reflect on the value of having non-perfectionists in the group too" says the researcher. "What do they bring?" she asks.

Amber	They balance you out.
Researcher	How? What do they contribute?
Bob	They help you see some stuff just isn't important.
The Matrix	They don't really care too much and they're fine and stuff.

Comment: It is interesting that Bob has placed herself among those with perfectionistic tendencies by commenting on the value of having the non-perfectionists around. Her BPS score places her in the perfectionistic range, but I've been unable to collect much supportive data for this diagnosis.

- Researcher I think the vision of [The Luck Bear] shooting that toad off her shoulder is priceless. You guys bring a lightness and a lack of intensity and humour and a perspective and a balance.
- Amber Some people can be laid back and stuff and they do things and their work is cool. But the perfectionist goes and tries to make it all perfect but they end up stuffing it up and the other person's work is better!

The girls' attention is drawn to the PLE model with the researcher's question "What are the 3 things you need to balance to become a life-long learner?" The girls call out unprompted "Performance", "Experience", "Learning". "So, what does it mean to learn?" the researcher asks:

- Unidentified girl To find out things...to take in knowledge.
- Researcher So that means before you learn it you didn't know it, right? So it's about not-knowing stuff and that means that sometimes you're going to look foolish...you'll fail. Think of a baby learning to walk...what happens to them a lot of the time?
- Unidentified girl They fall.
- Researcher Absolutely. And once they've fallen, what do they do?
- Unidentified girl They get right up.
- George They sometimes cry.
- Snagglepuss They're too young to understand shame!
- Researcher So shame is something we learn, that accompanies us falling over or making a mistake...we learn it.
- The Terminator That's why kids run around naked!
(general chortling)

Comment: Snagglepuss is not a regular contributor to group conversations and this priceless comment is muttered quietly. I drew it to the attention to the rest of the group by repeating it and elaborating the point. She was making a joke as she usually does, but she hit upon a key point in the development of perfectionistic thinking.

The researcher spends some time explaining how the PLE triangle can help to create a well-rounded attitude to learning. "It doesn't work" she explains "to tell perfectionists to stop being perfectionistic. That sounds like madness to them. The PLE model says you need to keep your standards high, but in three areas, not just one. Does that make sense?"

- Amber Does it count if you think you've done enough maths work and you decide you don't want to take your book home when other people are taking their book home?
- Researcher Do you need to take your book home to do more work or do you believe you've done enough?
- Amber I still get by.
- Researcher Then why would you want to take your book home?
- The Terminator Just in case.
- The Luck Bear Don't take it. It makes my bag too heavy. I have a one-strap shoulder bag and it cuts the circulation off in my shoulder!
(laughter)

Comment: Amber often asks for clarification as she attempts to apply the learnings from the workshop. Her attention to detail in this way is insightful and at the same time it amuses the other girls who at one point say "So many words [Amber]!"

Comment: Once again, The Luck Bear provided a light moment in the conversation which drew a startling contrast with the perfectionistic thinking behind the 'just in case' behaviour. Maybe this is not so 'light' an issue in view of current research into schoolbag weight and back problems (Legg, 200X)

Amber's original question is answered to some satisfaction, but she still seems slightly preoccupied for the next few moments. The others go on to talk about ways in which perfectionism affects them.

- Bob Depends if you're a perfectionist or not. If you're not, then you probably just get annoyed by everyone else around you having high standards.
- Researcher Oh, that's interesting. So, what's it like to be in a group with a perfectionist [Luck Bear]?
- The Luck Bear I just get over it. It's their life... and there's always [George]!
- George I'm not in your class!
- The Luck Bear At lunch and stuff when they talk about what they did in class and they ask 'what did you do' and I'm just blah blah.
- Researcher So, for you lunchtime is time out?
- The Luck Bear Yeah.
- The Terminator It's quite funny when people spend all their spare time talking about what questions they got wrong and what to do about it. It's like 'have a break...do your work in class!' It makes your friends cross. For all you know they might not care about test results and stuff and you're just getting them angry.

Comment: I found [George's] slight resistance to being grouped with the 'laid back' ones interesting. I am wondering if she disguises her striving in order to appear 'cool'. At another time in this conversation she made a remark that she was 'actually working this year...I don't know what is the matter with me'.

- Researcher Interesting point – even if you’re not a perfectionist, just to be around them, if they’re obsessing, can really put you off hanging out with them...
- George It’s good to be in groups with perfectionists because they want to do things right and get a good mark... they take the Japanese House home! (looking at *The Matrix*)
- Researcher Who did that?
- George No one. It’s a made up story! (she is teasing)
- Researcher (mock threatening tone) I need a name. [*Matrix*] is it you? Like the cake in art?
- The Matrix (laughs and doesn’t deny it)
- George We knew we wouldn’t get it done and stuff and it was overdue.
- Researcher So sometimes the perfectionist is good to have in the group because she can be relied on to make sure the work is OK?
- George But they also procrastinate because they know once it is started it has to be done really well.

Comment: This is the second anecdote about *The Matrix* that has been told by another girl. In both stories she features as a reliable and conscientious finisher of tasks. She quietly affirms the story without adding anything to it.

The girls finish their conversation with some sharing about the homework experiment. Few of the girls seem to have conducted the experiment, or at least are keen to talk about it with the group. Storm says she tried it out when babysitting her brother. The first time she carried out the experiment, she was the ‘perfect’ babysitter, making him food and supervising his homework. The second time she told him to make his own snack and then didn’t tell him to get off the playstation to do his homework. He got told off by his teacher the next day, and Storm feels it was her responsibility. “It’s not really up to you if he does his work or not!” states Amber, and then she mutters “I should be saying it to myself”. The girls consider the responsibilities of the babysitter – what is OK and what is beyond the call of duty. Storm says she feels responsible to earn her babysitting money ‘properly’. “If I don’t do it properly, then I’m not earning my money properly” she says. When the researcher talks about the conscientiousness of the perfectionist, Storm says “I’ve been called conscientious for a really long time.”

Comment: I’m not sure who George is including in ‘they’. Since procrastination was not mentioned in the anecdote about *The Matrix*, I wonder if this is an indirect way of referring to her own behaviour. I recall her comments about how much she hates her pestering voice urging ‘Do it, do it, do it’ when we talked about procrastination. Her comment mirrors Hamacheck’s (1978) observation “For perfectionists the idea of starting something or trying to achieve a goal is tormenting because they are so strongly driven by their need for perfection. A way to avoid the torment is to avoid starting.” (p.32).

Comment: My impression is that many of the girls found the instructions unclear and didn’t really know how to run their own personal experiment.

Comment: As Amber mirrors Storm’s thinking, she hears it resonating for herself as well. She can identify overhelping and taking responsibility for others in Storm’s behaviour, but may struggle to see this in her own behaviour until she confronts it in this way.

The session concludes with some boisterous Improv – ‘Death in a Minute’ and a version of ‘Space Jump’. The girls are still playing when the bell goes; some have to leave immediately so the researcher says to cut themselves a piece of cake as they leave. “Would they mind if she gets in touch again in the new year, once they have settled into their classes? she asks. “That will be fine” seems to be the general response. Handouts of articles on perfectionism are given to Amber, Storm, Bob and The Matrix along with the observation that ‘their parents may enjoy taking a look at what we’ve been doing and why’. Amber and Storm agree to meet for an interview with the researcher in a few weeks time. And both girls request a home visit to talk to their parents about the programme.

By the time the researcher gets to the cake it is all gone so she complains loudly, then grabs the huge piece of cake in the hands of The Luck Bear and cuts herself a small slice. “I should have asked a perfectionist to do this!” she exclaims. “Storm, you’d have counted the number of people here before cutting it up wouldn’t you?” “Yes, I’m afraid I would” Storm admits laughing.

11.3 Plan for Workshop Six

What follows is an outline of the scheduled activities for Workshop Six.

- Girls fill out the Burns Perfectionism Scale for 2nd time. Discussion about how it might be different for them now. Researcher collects sheets.
- Group conversation (taped with girls consent) guided by researcher on following topics:
Homework exercise on 'Lowering Standards'
Perfectionistic belief "Perfection will lead to happiness"
PLE model – need to balance 3 area of Performance, Experience and Learning
- Improv activities
'Death in a Minute' (see Appendix E)
'Space Jump'
- Gain consent from girls for follow-up next year
- Distribute articles on perfectionism to several girls
- Eat cake
- Make arrangements with Storm and Amber for follow-up interview.

Table 11.1: Workshop Six Plan

11.4 To what extent did the workshop fulfil its purpose?

The goals of the workshop were to retest the group with the BPS and discuss the experience; to summarise and provide an integrated view of the programme along with personal insights from the girls; and to gain consent for follow-up activities. I will comment on the extent to which these goals were achieved.

11.4.1 Retake Burns Perfectionism Scale and discuss

Before I scored the girls' responses on the BPS it was clear that this had been a very different experience from the first workshop when they originally completed the assessment. The atmosphere had less of a 'test-like' quality in that girls spoke readily, asked questions, complained and seemed to make

excuses for their answers being different this time. Amber took exception to the sixth test item ('It is shameful for me to display weaknesses or foolish behaviour), claiming that 'weakness' is totally different from 'foolish behaviour', and therefore needed two separate answers, each at opposite ends of the spectrum. She also struggled to answer item one this time, leaving two indeterminate marks in two boxes rather than a decisive choice.

Others remarked that they were seeing the questions in a different way this time; some claimed they still couldn't understand them, but others said they knew how they were scored now and that made a difference in the way they responded. Someone explained that she found it difficult to assess how she felt 'most of the time', and someone commented that it was difficult to think about your thinking. The BPS test items require considerable personal reflection and this may be beyond the reflective capacity of some of the girls. Issues surrounding the use of the BPS will be explored more fully in Chapter Twelve.

Another difference this time was the fact that nine of the eleven girls made written comments along with their test responses. When the scale was administered in Workshop One, only two of the girls had included optional comments. This time the comments often referred to a difficulty in answering a particular test item, such as "It depends what for", "Number One is hard", and "With number seven it depends what kind of mistake". Others predicted how their score would be different from last time.

But the biggest difference of all turned out to be the actual scores on the BPS. One girl had remarked as she completed it that I had turned her into a perfectionist, and I must admit that was my first reaction when I compared the two sets of BPS scores. Nine of the eleven scores had increased (Table 11.2)

Name (Pseudonym)	BPS Scores		Change
	Workshop One	Workshop Six	
Amber	28	34	+6
Storm	22	23	+1
Bob	22	27	+5
The Terminator	20	31	+11
The Matrix	20	15	-5
Secret Squirrel	19	13	-6
George	18	22	+4
Jose	18	Absent	
Yoda	16	17	+1
Banana Hammock	14	15	+1
The luck bear	14	20	+6
Maria Favrina	12	Absent	
Snagglepuss	11	12	+1

Table 11.2: Two sets of scores for each participant on the Burns Perfectionism Scale

In retrospect, I would have liked to present the girls with their new scores and offered them the chance to comment. This way, more useful data would have been provided about the way in which the girls made their choices. At the time I was reluctant to ascribe too much importance to actual scores on the BPS – especially given the girls fascination for measurement and grades - and so I had decided not to share the scores with them. I believe that talking over the test items at this stage would have been a useful exercise and an effective means of summarising the rationale of the programme.

In a general sense, the scores continue to reflect the order and range of perfectionism among the girls that I had identified via observation, testing and conversation analysis. Amber, Storm and Bob are still scoring in the vulnerable range. The score for The Matrix has dropped beneath the threshold for vulnerability, whereas The Terminator's score has risen dramatically to the second to highest score overall. Despite her claims that she was feeling 'more positive today' and that her score would likely reflect that positivity, George's score has increased to place her more definitively in perfectionistic range. Incredibly, The Luck Bear's score has jumped to 20 from 14, which places her on the borderline for perfectionism.

Without comment from the girls about their responses to specific test items, I must rely on my knowledge of perfectionism, my knowledge of the girls and my observations of them during the six weeks of the programme to proffer plausible explanations for the changes in BPS scores. The challenge of making sense of these changes will be confronted in Chapter 13.

11.4.2 *Provide an integrated summary of the programme*

My plan was to draw together the various threads of the programme via 'mini-lessons' amidst group conversation. The conversation would be guided through subject areas – the main concepts and models of the programme – and would encourage the girls to share personal insights. In addition, to the girls identified as vulnerable to perfectionism - or as I now preferred to call them 'fledgling perfectionists' – I would provide copies of the Burns (1980) article and a chapter from Adderholdt and Greenberg's book *What's Bad About Being Too Good* (2001). Burns (1980) provides clear explanations for many of the programme activities, and Adderholdt and Greenberg (2001) detail several manifestations of perfectionistic thinking among teenagers at school.

Reading the transcript of the conversation it is clear that many of the planned subjects were addressed and effectively summarised. Retention by the girls of details related to the PLE model and recall of some new terms like 'galumphing' were quite remarkable. Regardless of its efficacy, the material was well learned and retained. My concern, supported by Amber's request for clarification about how to apply the PLE model to a specific event, is that the girls needed more help making personal application of the material, and I have been consistently commenting on this theme when evaluating each of the workshops. Once again, I believe more one-to-one time would have been useful and more physical, concrete experience would facilitate their integration of new ideas.

One significant aspect of the group conversation technique was its emergent nature. I had a plan of subject areas and key points to make but it became clear that while I could initiate the subject of our talk, I had little control over its ensuing direction. The energy and chattiness of the girls during this final workshop meant that we took more time than I had expected to cover the necessary subject areas. A consequence of allowing the conversation to extend further into the time allowance of one hour was to lose the interest and attention of some of the girls.

I was pleased with the level of disclosure and sharing of insights that went on during this conversation. In particular, in response to the question "What do non-perfectionists bring to the group?" most of the perfectionistic girls expressed their appreciation for the different perspectives these girls contributed. Although the Matrix was a very quiet group member, she made a comment on this topic to the effect that she appreciated seeing "they [non-perfectionists] don't really care too much and they're fine and stuff". This comment echoes The Matrix's belief "Without my perfectionism I'd be nothing". I was delighted to see that she was beginning to question the illusory relationship between perfection and self-worth.

I enjoyed the discussion about what it is like to be around perfectionists. My initial question was, "How does perfectionism affect you?" but the first girl to respond commented from the perspective of a non-perfectionist and suggested that it may be 'annoying' to have everyone around you with high standards. I probed this angle a little more and unearthed various views of what it is like to be around perfectionists. Opinions ranged from "It's their life" to "It's funny how some of them spend all their spare time talking about what they got wrong" and then "[I feel like telling them] Have a break...do your work in class!" and as this girl (The Terminator) became more engaged with her thoughts she warned any who were listening "Don't make your friends cross!" As the talk seemed to get a little negative about perfectionists, George suggested there was a more positive view by sharing an anecdote highlighting conscientiousness which was based on The Matrix taking home a group project to get it finished on time. I suspect that this was the first time some of the perfectionistic girls had heard honest feedback about what other people thought of their perfectionism. For some, they may have been enlightened about the potential for others to take advantage of them. For others, the interpersonal repercussions of perfectionism may have been revelatory.

It became apparent that structured follow-up would improve the likelihood of the programme making a difference in the lives of these girls. While this was originally outside of the parameters of this research study, I arranged to (1) interview two girls from the programme, (2) visit the group next year once they have settled into their Year 11 classes and (3) make two home visits – one to Amber's parents and one to Storm's – in order to explain the purpose and the nature of the programme. The girls seemed pleased, or at least accepting, about the prospect of further contact next year. Many thanked me as they gobbled their slab of cake and fled.

Reports from all three intended activities will not be part of this thesis, however, the interview with the girls provided useful information about the effectiveness of the programme and will be summarised in section 11.5.

11.5 Follow-up interview with Storm and Amber

I met with Amber and Storm four weeks after the programme concluded to review the programme from their perspective. These girls were chosen for the interview because they had both scored highly on perfectionism indicators and had both signalled a willingness to pursue follow-up activity. The interview was held at a café near to the girls' school and lasted approximately an hour and a half. A list of questions used to guide the interview is included in Appendix M. The girls had been told that they would be asked questions relating to the usefulness of the programme. The interview was not taped but I took extensive notes which I typed up immediately afterwards. The constructed transcript, which is included in section 11.5.1, includes some interpretive observation related to the key issues of perfectionism and the intervention.

Subsequent to this interview, the thesis was written up and a presentation made to interested parents, students and staff (including the principal) at the school. I have also agreed to meet with the school counsellor to further put her in the picture regarding both the nature of the programme and the identity of the 'fledgling perfectionists'.

11.5.1 Transcript of interview with 'Storm' and 'Amber' Nov 22nd 2002

KEY:	
Amber	A
Storm	S
Researcher	R

R What have you done differently since the programme?

A I've been more thoughtful about everything. I've been studying myself. I think I've set some lower standards for tests in that I'm not going to be disappointed with lower marks. I'm always comparing myself to 'Storm'. I used to think 75 – 80% was a minimum for grades, but now I think I can live with 65%. For example, I got 45% for Social Studies, which is not a great mark, but I'm not serious about the subject so I'm not beating myself up about it.

Comment: Amber's comment indicates a willingness to consider flexible standards depending on the demands of the occasion.

S I haven't lowered my standards. [Amber] helps me out from time to time. On my birthday she wrote me a card saying 'you're special' no matter what happens, you'll always be you and smart and things.

Comment: Storm is reassured by Amber's love and acceptance which is not based on achievement. In this way too, the girls formed an impromptu support group for one another.

I've realised that I want things to be good. I was initially really stressed about Art because I'm not good at it, and they MAKE you do an art subject at school. But it's the end of the year, I've done the course and it doesn't really matter any more. Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses.

A Isn't it funny that most of things I want to do well in, I HATE learning. Maths for example.

R Why do you want to do well in maths?

A It's a core subject so it's important, and I've always done well in maths. And everybody says it's something you have to do before you can do other things.

S And maybe also because it is something you can answer yes or no to rather than be judged on your ideas.

R What did you learn about your selves?

S That there are others like me – that helped a lot.

Comment: I'm pleased to hear this response because I had hoped the programme would provide a needed group experience for these extremely independent self-reliant girls. Awareness that there are others like them may lessen the intensity of their self-criticism.

R In what way?

S In intermediate/primary school I was surrounded by a group of really laid back students – I thought I was the only one who wanted to work hard and that I was a geek because I was always working. And in the programme it was good to find others with perfectionistic qualities.

Comment: The added pressure of feeling like a 'geek' because she valued hard work must have exacerbated the already heavy burden of perfectionism for Storm. To be a perfectionist and for it to be a guilty secret is a double burden. Experiencing her own perfectionism in the group situation and hearing others share their own struggles seems to have lessened her burden.

A For me, it is sometimes the other way around. Being around people who didn't care about their work made me feel really good about myself in comparison!

R What else did you discover about yourself?

A I rely too much on MARKS. And I sometimes pretend I don't care about them but I do.

Comment: Amber has shown extreme reliance on measurement and comparative assessment for reassurance that she is performing well. This comment reflects that reliance, as do the following remarks which link self-worth with high grades.

R In what way do you rely on marks – what do they give you?

A Something on paper that says who you are.

Comment: The perfectionist imagines she will lose her 'edge' if she gives up her perfectionism. This perfectionistic belief "Without my perfectionism, I'd be nothing" was challenged in the workshops. I attempted to disrupt the perceived relationship between perfectionism and success. At the same time, Greenspon (2002) notes that "giving up perfectionism brings a loss of identity as a particular kind of person. Changing this can be scary and difficult" (p. 90).

S I think I'm a perfectionist just in my schoolwork... and maybe cleanliness – my bedroom is really clean. And in organisation... in fact I'm a bit obsessive about organisation. I co-ordinate things by colour, my wardrobe is categorised according to item (trousers one side, skirts and tops on the other).

A If you pack a suitcase do you have everything really neat and organised and in its right place?

S Yes.

R How do you hang out the washing?

S Oh no... don't ask me. It's towels first then I work back to small things like socks and pants. And I get really irritated when other people hang things up the wrong way.

Comment: During this comment Storm came gradually to realise the extent to which her perfectionism may be influencing her life. Attention to detail and orderliness are not the same as perfectionism, but if Storm comes to feel that she MUST do these things in order to be worthwhile, then perfectionism becomes the driver.

R Do you have a desk?

S I have a chest of drawers at home and normally it's really tidy but it's messy at the moment because we've just had exams. But normally I dust it every 2 weeks and sort my drawers every 3 weeks.

R How do you keep yourself on schedule for every 2 or 3 weeks?

S I have my wall-planner right there.

R And do you write on the planner when it's time to dust and sort?

S Yes, but I use symbols.

R What have you learnt about perfectionism?

S I feel that when my good marks come, then perfectionism had something to do with it. My parents are both [she names a hard-working culture] and come from a very competitive culture. They have always worked hard and they've encouraged me to strive. I care more about pleasing them than pleasing myself I think. But now I also want to achieve, so maybe I've learnt that from them?

Comment: Storm is trying to understand how she came by her perfectionistic tendencies. She identifies her family environment as one that highly values achievement and hard work.

R That's something we'll never know really, because you'll never get a chance to be raised by a different set of parents. So, do you think you'll be able to maintain your perfectionism at this level of intensity throughout your life?

S I'd like to always do my best even if it's not enough.

Comment: I wonder what Storm means by 'not enough'. Not getting an 'A' perhaps? If she has done her best then is it enough? I wish I had followed up this response.

A There's a little bit of perfectionism in everything I do. But maybe if you looked at everyone through a magnifying glass you'd see it too. I was going to say I wasn't perfectionistic about sport, but I think I probably am because I want to do well at it. I don't think I've ever given myself a chance to prove whether I'm good at it – Intermediate was a nightmare for instance – I was with all the worst kids who called me 'teacher's pet'. [She names her new sport] has helped me to loosen up a bit in sport.

R Will you be able to carry on your current level of striving forever?

A Probably not. I fear disappointing myself.

R What would make the programme more useful to you?

S Talking about perfectionism more. Seeing it in your whole life, not just schoolwork and identifying it in use more. Maybe longer sessions. Some individual work as well as the group work.

Comment: Storm's feedback about the programme closely mirrors my own views. I'm interested that she welcomes more in-depth work at an individual level. Her quietness in some of the group activities certainly didn't reflect a lack of interest or engagement; rather, she is keen for more work and a more personal focus.

A I'd like more chance to write – I'm constantly analysing myself.

S I keep a personal journal at home that nobody sees. Written stuff is too personal to share because I write without self-censoring.

R What would be helpful to you now?

Comment: Storm stopped keeping diary entries after the 3rd workshop.

S With NCEA next year we need to learn more about using PLE in our study.

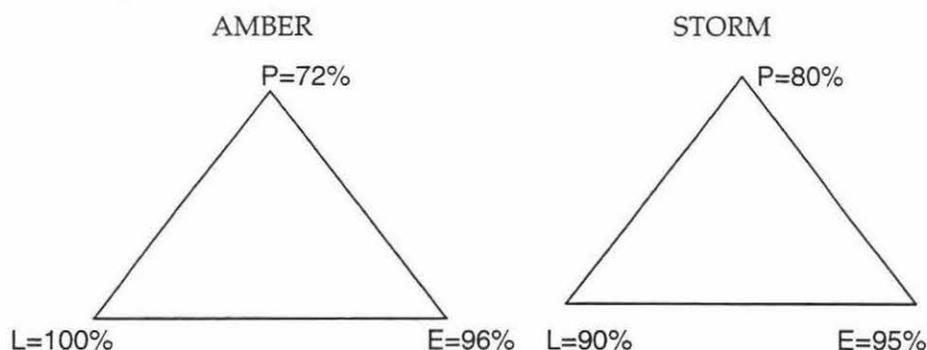
- A The school says 'get involved in everything', but at the same time they reward good grades, so you have to be good at things, so they're encouraging perfectionism aren't they?
- R Maybe it's only perfectionists who hear that as 'you have to be good at everything'. Others just give things a go.
- S I don't think I should need help from anyone else. It's not up to others, we should do it on our own.

Comment: Amber is reflecting on her perfectionism and the cultural milieu that supports it. It is good to see her identifying some of those school-based values and practices.

Comment: Storm has a strong sense of self-reliance and reluctance to have her obligations taken care of by others. In addition, her use of 'should' suggests something more than self-reliance is involved; there are signs of perfectionistic striving.

(End of transcript.)

The girls then completed an assessment sheet which rated eight programme strategies on a 4-point scale from 'Not useful' to 'Extremely Useful' (see appendix X) and will be discussed later in this chapter. Amber commented that her assessment of the strategies would be different if I had asked how much she enjoyed them rather than how useful they were. I realised that the assessment sheet was strongly performance-focused, so I asked Amber to give more holistic ratings to each item; as well as the 'How useful?' criteria for each item, she could select either P,L or E from the 'Sustainable Work' model to represent each of the programme techniques. The girls also assessed themselves on the programme by awarding percentages for 'Performance', 'Learning' and 'Experience'. Their assessments were as follows:



The girls had not been given specific criteria for high achievement on the course, so it was interesting to see how they would assess their performance. Both girls considered 'involvement' and 'input' to be indicators of success. Of interest is that they both gave themselves lower scores for Performance than for Learning and Experience.

CHAPTER 12:*Key issues arising from the Case Study*

Chapters six through eleven described and interpreted events from the six workshops comprising the Life-Long Learning intervention programme. The process of developing and delivering this programme has generated both conclusions and questions around perfectionism and the nature of successful intervention with the targeted group. This chapter will discuss further key issues relevant to the programme.

Key issues considered in this chapter fall into three main areas: (1) issues related to the nature of perfectionism within the study group; (2) issues related to specific techniques used in the programme; and (3) ideas for future interventions and research.

12.1 Issues related to the nature of perfectionism within the study group

During the course of this study, several issues arose regarding the nature of perfectionism among the target group. The first issue relates to the chosen definition of perfectionism and its relevance with the study group; the second explores the ability of Kirks' (2000) Model of Change to predict and guide the process of confronting perfectionistic thinking; and the third is the suitability of intervention at the level of the target population.

12.1.1 Defining perfectionism

At the outset, a definition of perfectionism by Shafran (2001) was modified to provide a relevant measure for an adolescent population of gifted girls who are likely to be functioning at a pre-clinical level of significance. That definition stressed the "overdependence of self-evaluation on achievement of self-imposed personally demanding standards ...despite the occurrence of adverse consequences". The modification added that the perfectionist might

perceive those adverse consequences – at least in the early stages - as less significant than positive outcomes that they attribute to their perfectionism.

The research supported my expectation that the study group would not include clinical perfectionists. Several girls did score within the vulnerable range for perfectionism on the Burns Perfectionism Scale, with the most consistent indicators of their perfectionism - according to observation and analysis - being self-criticism and sensitivity to feedback from others, procrastination, and unrealistic goal-setting along with overdependence of self-evaluation on achievement of those goals. Supplementary data on the girls gathered from self-reports, written comments and conversational analysis did not support a clinical diagnosis and revealed that the girls were not suffering significant adverse consequences. Rather, those girls identified with perfectionistic tendencies consistently reported their perfectionism in a mostly positive way, linking it to their high marks and success in other fields. The perfectionistic belief “Without my perfectionism, I’d be nothing” was strongly held by the perfectionistic girls.

In response to a question in Workshop One, which asked, “What does it mean to be a perfectionist?” six girls mentioned the possibility of adverse consequences such as “*having* to be the best” and “not being happy unless everything is perfect”. A consideration of those responses in the light of my subsequent assessment of the girls’ perfectionistic tendencies reveals that not one of the most perfectionistic girls (Amber, Storm and The Matrix – Bob was absent for this workshop) identified adverse consequences to perfectionism. I would suggest that non-perfectionists may gain a unique and useful perspective of perfectionists with whom they associate; a perspective which may not yet be accessible to the perfectionists themselves who are still enjoying the fruits of success from perfectionistic strategies.

Another of the questions from Workshop One asked, "Does perfectionism help or hinder my progress? Only two of the girls responded that perfectionism was a hindrance to progress; neither girl was subsequently identified with perfectionistic tendencies and yet they articulated some of the drawbacks from this approach as "not realistic" and "you wouldn't get things finished". Of the highly perfectionistic girls, Amber conceded that perfectionism was a two-edged sword; it drives her to get better marks but on the other hand, it results in her putting herself down when she doesn't achieve outstandingly. Amber's awareness of the apparent dual nature of perfectionism may be a sign that she is beginning to experience some of the adverse consequences and is attributing them to her perfectionism.

In Workshop Two we explored the downside of perfectionism by constructing a list of pros and cons. As a group the girls readily identified many potential disadvantages to perfectionism along with an understanding that it is unrealistic and ultimately self-defeating. The ambivalence of the girls' feelings about perfectionism was revealed well in this exercise and the paradox of holding conflicting views created some discomfort, as seen in a comment by one girl that "we need to think up some more positives!"

I explored this paradox with the girls over the course of several workshops to help them see that their success came from hard work and ability rather than perfectionistic striving (Barrow & Moore, 1983). In this way an emergent purpose for the programme became the raising of girls' awareness of the deleterious effects of perfectionism on sustainable learning, while valuing the pursuit of excellence and hard work.

I concluded that modifying Shafran's (2002) definition as described above was necessary for working with adolescent girls, as it accommodated the pre-clinical nature of their perfectionism. This will be discussed further in section

12.1.3. The definition used throughout the programme is stated in Chapter Two (section 2.1.1) of this thesis.

12.1.2 The role of Kirk's Change Model in the programme

The process of exposing the inconsistency within the girls' beliefs challenged their current ways of understanding the world. Kirk's (2000) growth cycle model refers to this provocation as 'perturbation'; a condition of increased agitation and stress within a living system as it attempts to make sense of any new or challenging input from the environment. Perturbation is a necessary state for any living system on the path to increasingly complex learning and understanding.

The behaviour and comments of Amber, in particular, reflected significant perturbation as she attempted to reconcile the new information and experience of the programme with what she had previously believed. Her remarks reflected an inner struggle as she tried to understand the role of perfectionism in her life, its contribution to her successes, and the costs of such a strategy on her happiness and prospects for life-long learning. Amber's perturbation was externalised as physical agitation, intense questioning, and confronting of others with her dilemmas. At one point she suggested that she needed counselling to help deal with all her 'mulling over the issues from the workshops' since it was making her 'cranky' at herself and others. I initially felt anxious about the level of Amber's agitation, but came to realise that what I was observing and what Amber was experiencing was the natural chaos and discomfort that accompanies any attempt to integrate new information. Keeping Kirk's (2000) model in mind eased my own fears about the process and provided useful direction for ways in which I could facilitate the girls' growth as they approached the 'bifurcation point'. I did not want to contribute to a dissipation of their valuable energy and the agitation generated by the programme. The withdrawal of one girl – Cool Bananas – after attending Workshop Two may have been due to excess perturbation

caused by the high-risk Improv activities of that workshop. These activities required a strongly supportive environment, which she likely was not experiencing as a consequence of missing the first workshop session.

Kirk's model also highlighted the need for a supportive environment within which new ideas and beliefs could be entertained rather than dismissed as 'not fitting' with the present structures. An individual is likely to be open to change if their environment encourages flexibility, uncertainty and spontaneity. Within the study, Improvisational Drama was the medium used to create the required culture of acceptance of failure, curiosity and flexibility of thought. 'Failure celebrations' and games that stressed 'offer' and 'yield', and sharing of control contributed to this culture. I concluded from the girls' participation and their subsequent comments that they both enjoyed the Improv and appreciated the opportunities to 'stuff-up' in public and survive the experience.

While Improvisational Drama was the context chosen for this study within which perturbation occurred and was contained, it would be interesting to explore other useful contexts within which the same principles of support, safety and challenge could be adhered to.

I concluded that Kirk's model, while not shared with the girls, was a critical element of the programme. In particular, it was a powerful reference in designing the programme and enabling me, as facilitator, to respond appropriately to the girls' reactions.

12.1.3 Suitability of level of intervention

As noted earlier, the study became an awareness raising exercise among girls who exhibited vulnerabilities for perfectionism, while not functioning in the clinical range. This raises the question, 'is this a point of intervention with high leverage among perfectionistic populations?' In Chapter Two, research

was cited (Shafran, 2002b, Morill & Hurst, 1971, and Ferguson & Rodway 1994) which supports early intervention approaches to perfectionism, claiming the condition becomes increasingly intractable once it has acquired associated pathologies. The cited studies support the intervention philosophy to provide an experience that can stimulate and facilitate developmental progression, not 'cure a malady' (Barrow & Moore, 1983). Adolescence was identified as a period of significant realignment of values and beliefs that could well be exploited by an intervention designed to reframe existing worldviews.

This study supported the claim that in the case of this specific population – gifted fourteen year-old girls – the developmental approach was appropriate. At the start, not even the highest scoring perfectionistic girl in the group was at a point where she acknowledged perfectionism is not entirely to her advantage. And, until this point is reached, any attempt to 'treat' the disorder is likely to fail (Burns, 1980).

Shafran and Mansell (2001) point out that given the 'right' conditions, perfectionism intensifies, becoming excessive along with negative and destructive consequences, which overwhelm any positive outcome. One example of such 'right' conditions may be a change in circumstances (such as starting University), which makes a previously attainable standard unrealistic. If a student persists with perfectionistic expectations and behaviour in this altered environment, she may begin to experience negative consequences such as uncompleted work, exhaustion and repeated exposure to failure. According to the systems model proposed in Chapter Four (Figure 4.1), such deterioration in work and performance confirms the perfectionist's perception of herself as being far from perfect. After some efforts to bring about consistency of beliefs by working around the B3 'trying hard' loop with growing frustration, perfectionists might attempt to achieve consistency by changing their judgements about themselves (loop B2). Tragically, this would

normally involve changing “I am a worthwhile and valuable person” to “I am not a worthwhile or valuable person”. Blatt (1995) traces out a possible path by which perfectionism may become associated with emotional disorders:

Deep-seated feelings of inferiority and vulnerability force the individual into an endless cycle of self-defeating over-striving in which each task and enterprise becomes another threatening challenge. No effort is ever sufficient, as the individual constantly seeks approval and acceptance and desperately tries to avoid errors and failure (p.1007).

He further comments “individuals with high levels of self-criticism and perfectionism are vulnerable to experiences of failure to which they react with increased levels of depression” (p.1007). Vulnerability to failure experiences can also serve to activate suicide potential in some perfectionistic individuals (Flett, Hewitt & Blankstein, 1991 in Blatt, 1995). Anecdotal evidence cited by Delisle (1986) suggests that the relationship between perfectionism and suicide appears to be particularly intense among gifted adolescents.

In view of the research cited and for reasons already enumerated it was thought most useful in this study to target gifted adolescents for whom perfectionism has not become pathological or reached clinical significance. As I wrote up the case study I struggled to label the girls who I had identified as vulnerable to perfectionism since the term ‘perfectionist’ did not seem relevant to them at this point in their lives. It was a typically extreme comment from Amber, that she was a ‘full-blown’ perfectionist that suggested a possible categorisation for these girls. I adopted the term – in my own thinking and field notes – of ‘fledgling perfectionist’ to describe those who were vulnerable to developing ‘fully-fledged perfectionism’. The ‘fledgling’ girls were on the cusp of awareness that their perfectionistic strategies did not serve them well and were not sustainable in the long term.

Prior research in this area, as well as support from this study, stresses that effective intervention with perfectionists occurs in the form of developmental, awareness-raising programmes targeting pre-clinical perfectionists. To help with identification of these pre-clinical or 'fledgling' perfectionists, especially among gifted female adolescents, a list of their characteristics has been collated in Table 12.1. This list is based on observation and analysis of all case study data.

CHARACTERISTICS OF 'FLEDGLING PERFECTIONISTS':
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procrastination • Self-criticism • Sensitivity to feedback • Unrealistic goal-setting • All-or-nothing thinking • Self-worth reliant on performance • Perfectionism viewed as mainly positive • Early signs of awareness that perfectionism is unsustainable • Reluctance to work in groups • Intense focus on 'measurement' and 'assessment' • Avoidance of failure by not trying new things • Obsessive behaviours may be recognised by friends/peers

Table 12.1: Characteristics of 'fledgling perfectionists'

12.2 Issues related to specific techniques used in the programme

Many of the strategies, techniques and activities used in the programme have been commented on in the chapter describing the workshops. There are, however, further holistic observations to be made about several of these features of the programme; those features include use of the Burns Perfectionism Scale, use of the Sustainable Work Model (PLE) in conjunction with the systems model proposed in Chapter Four, use of Improvisational Drama, and use of a group intervention approach which included non-perfectionists.

12.2.1 *Use of the Burns Perfectionism Scale*

After administering the BPS during the first workshop and subsequently scoring the tests, I was alarmed to find only two girls (Amber and Storm) scoring in the range of perfectionistic vulnerability (Bob wasn't present in the first workshop and her score subsequently equalled the high score of Storm). My experience and observation of the girls during the workshop had resulted in a higher expectation for perfectionistic scores than the BPS seemed to be conveying.

It was for this reason that I introduced an alternative perfectionism scale (The 'Quick Quiz' from Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999) during the next workshop, in the hope that the items might be more relevant to the school-based experience of the girls, and that this relevance would translate into higher perfectionism scores. With the exception of a few rearrangements in the order of scores overall, both scales identified the same girls as variously vulnerable to perfectionism (Amber, Storm, The Matrix, The Terminator, and George). I reviewed the literature on the BPS and reflected on its clinical focus within adult populations. After some consideration it seemed reasonable that a non-clinical population of self-selected adolescents would not necessarily include perfectionists operating at a level of significance as identified by the BPS. The girls' scores on the BPS would need to be confirmed or disproved from supplementary sources.

My initial concerns about the lower than expected BPS scores were allayed by my observations during the programme, thematic analysis of girls' comments, scores on the Quick Quiz, and formulation of the 'fledgling perfectionist' concept. The next challenge was interpreting the girls' scores from the BPS administered at the end of the programme.

As mentioned in Chapter eleven, BPS scores for nine of the eleven girls increased. This is a disconcerting result, given that the programme intended

to help perfectionists. In addition to the discussion presented in Chapter eleven, I would like to posit some further suggestions about the apparently paradoxical increase in scores. One explanation may relate to the test-retest reliability of the BPS; Hewitt (1982) obtained a test-retest coefficient of 0.63 for college students over a 2-month period. Other figures cited in Hewitt (1982) come from Burns' (1984) own research with 32 female graduates over a 6-week interval which yielded a test-retest correlation of 0.78. While these findings are considered adequate for research purposes (Nunnally, 1978), their reliability needs to be viewed with caution outside the graduate population. There do not appear to be any test-retest reliability studies for the BPS with populations similar to my study group.

The increase in scores could be a chance finding, or as suggested by Shafran (personal communication, December 8, 2002) it could be "a more general phenomenon in that a group of people the same age and sex as [this group] may well increase their scores on the questionnaire with any intervention that addresses these issues. This increase may be due to heightened awareness of the issues, or it could be due to completing the questionnaire twice". Comments by the girls' to the effect that they found the second experience of completing the questionnaire very different to the first time, lend support to the notion that they became a more 'aware' or 'sophisticated' population. Some of the girls commented that they now understood what the questions meant and knew how it was marked so they were answering differently.

Another contributing factor to variability in the girls' BPS scores may relate to their level of reflective thought. Kitchener and Brenner (1990) have developed a seven-stage model of reflective judgement, which describes the process by which an individual builds their "View of knowledge" and the related "Concept of justification". True 'reflective' thought, according to Kitchener (1986) occurs only when an individual reaches the seventh stage. Kitchener and King (1990) discovered that students selected for high scholastic aptitude

were functioning in the range of Stages 2 to 3.5 in high school (the same age as my study group); college students functioned in the 3 to 4.5 range and graduate students in the 4.5 to 6.5 range. These results suggest that when 14 year-olds are confronted with experience which provides messy or complex problems, they are unlikely to be able to satisfactorily seek alternative ways of looking at the data. Many of the girls in this study commented on how 'hard' the questions were, indicating that they challenged the girls' reflective capacity. In this way, the girls were certainly stretched by the programme. While they seemed to enjoy the challenge, their developing reflective judgement skills ought to be considered when interpreting their BPS scores.

I consider the effect of 'awareness-raising' to be the most likely explanation for the increase in scores. The notion of 'fledgling perfectionism' carries with it an implicit unconsciousness of many underlying perfectionistic beliefs and assumptions. The programme surfaced many of those assumptions and confronted the girls with a more accurate depiction of their worldview than they had previously encountered. Consequently, it is not surprising to note elevated scores on perfectionism indicators as girls come to terms with their complex pattern of perfectionistic attitudes and behaviours.

The variability of BPS scores may well be a further characteristic of fledgling perfectionists as they develop self-awareness. However, this is a tentative conclusion, and I am not prepared at this time to add it to the list of Characteristics of Fledgling Perfectionists (see Table 12.1).

Many of the score discrepancies consisted of just one point of increase and can be dismissed. Of the five more significant discrepancies (4 points – 11 points increase) it is interesting to note that four of them occurred among the 'fledgling perfectionists' (Amber, Bob, The Terminator, and George) and just one occurred with a non-perfectionist (The Luck Bear). The two other

'fledgling perfectionists' were Storm – whose score was essentially unchanged - and The Matrix – whose score decreased by 5 points.

A possible explanation of the elevated score for the Luck Bear – who delighted the group with her laid-back style - might be a growing awareness of her potential to achieve excellence. During the 'lowering standards' experiment in Workshop Five, she had joked that she, along with the other non-perfectionists, ought to try *raising* their standards.

Aside from these possible explanations for the discrepancies in BPS scores, there remain the possibility of distortion due to self-report and 'social desirability response set' as mentioned in Chapter Three.

Notwithstanding the unexpected increases in scores, the BPS accurately identified perfectionistic vulnerability among the five highest-scoring girls.

12.2.2 Use of the Sustainable Work (PLE) Model

Gallwey's (2000) three-element model of sustainable work provided a theoretical framework for the proposed 'reframing' of the perfectionists' worldview. Reframing involved moving from an exclusive focus on performance to an understanding of the interdependence of the three elements of Performance, Learning and Experience. This understanding underpinned the research attempt to broaden the perfectionistic belief "Only perfect performance is acceptable" to "Life-long learning depends on the mutual support of high levels of performance, *and* high levels of learning *and* high levels of experience".

I chose this approach after discovering that traditional treatment methods for perfectionism have proven unsatisfactory (Burns, 1999). Perfectionists complain that it does not help to be told they have impossible expectations and that if they would just stop being so perfectionistic they would feel better.

This approach fails to take into consideration the perfectionist's high need for achievement. Providing insight into the perfectionist's difficulties, along with exhortations to 'ease up' may seem logical, yet in view of the processes maintaining perfectionism (see Figure 4.1) it is clear that lowering standards without any other compensatory change to the individual's worldview creates dissonance.

Bearing in mind that the perfectionistic girls in this study were 'fledgling perfectionists' any immediate and single-minded effort to coax them away from their perfectionistic striving would likely have failed. The 'fledgling perfectionists' did not – at the outset of the programme – see perfectionism as debilitating. Broadening their standards to include learning and experience allowed them to continue valuing high achievement while they considered a more balanced and sustainable approach. The model offered a non-judgmental way of treating perfectionism, which the girls seemed to appreciate. The girls readily understood and adopted the model as a way of describing perfectionistic behaviour in the group sessions, although I did note the difficulty some girls had in making personal applications of the model to their daily experiences. I would foresee difficulties using the model with younger girls who may not have the necessary cognitive capacity or reflective skills to make it work. In conclusion, the Sustainable Work Model was crucial to this intervention and will also provide a useful framework for follow-up work with the girls.

12.2.3 Use of Improvisational Drama

Improv proved to be an enormous hit with the girls; I suspect many of them signed up for the programme in the first place because of the promise of Improv games. At the very beginning when I recruited volunteers from the two streamed classes, I mentioned that Improv was part of the programme, and I had concerns that the fear of being 'put on the spot' might keep all the perfectionists away. I cannot be sure to what extent that happened, but the

inclusion of several boisterous, risk-taking non-perfectionists who contributed hugely to the experience, compensated for any losses.

The energy and spontaneity generated by the games were critical in building an atmosphere of fun and play. The humorous side of Improv provided much mirth and light-heartedness around a subject that can be bleak and humourless. Gentle teasing and spontaneous humour directed at perfectionistic foibles can facilitate awareness and shifting of cognitive patterns (Barrow & Moore, 1983). I believe the light-hearted spirit in the workshops contributed to high levels of self-disclosure - particularly among the 'fledgling perfectionists'- and their willingness to question their current beliefs. In addition, the fun atmosphere likely contributed to the retention of the non-perfectionists in the programme.

While Amber and Storm both rated Improv as only 'slightly useful' (see Appendix M), they agreed it had been immensely enjoyable. The Improv was more useful to me as an observer as I looked for signs that the girls were trying to script their responses, avoid risks, block offers, take control, or fight uncertainty and being in the moment. These behaviours were important in identifying girls likely to be perfectionistic. My challenge continued to be one of how to be involved in the games and simultaneously make insightful and pertinent observations. Participant-observation allowed a 'hands-on' experience of specific instances of the girls' behaviour, but limited my awareness of the multitude of happenings in the entire group.

I conclude that Improv provided a suitable medium for the developmental nature of this programme. It promoted a safe, supportive environment within which risk-taking and mistake-making were welcomed. To improve the usefulness of this strategy, I would recommend co-facilitation of Improv sessions so a broader and more reliable picture of the girls' behaviour can be constructed.

12.2.4 *Use of a group intervention including non-perfectionists*

Some assessment of the group intervention approach has been made in the workshop chapters, to the effect that group dynamics contributed positively to the process of building awareness among the perfectionists. Observations made by other girls were often delivered in language familiar to the perfectionists, using examples they had in common. For these reasons, and due to the credibility ascribed to peers, comments from the group seemed to have enormous significance and were well accepted.

At times the group took over the role of explaining the downside of perfectionistic thinking and this seemed to reduce the threat, which may have been perceived if I (an adult and stranger) had expounded to them the 'dangers' of perfectionism. On one occasion the group of non-perfectionists shared a fascinating, if somewhat negative, glimpse of what it is like to spend time with a perfectionist, and I imagine hearing this from peers, couched in interpersonal terms would have had great persuasive power.

The downside of group work became apparent as I found myself needing to speak to some of the girls individually. Particularly after I had made the initial identification of girls with perfectionistic tendencies, it would have been useful to supplement the group session with some individual work (probably after Workshop Three). Amber and Storm also noted this possible improvement during their evaluation interview (section 12.1). Some one-to-one time would have enabled a more detailed and tailored assessment of the nature of each girl's perfectionism. It would also have ensured that they understood how to apply the PLE model to various situations.

I came to appreciate the need for extra individual time in the programme, but this did not in any way undermine the value of the group approach; rather, I see the two approaches working in a complementary fashion.

Another design feature of the groups was the inclusion of non-perfectionists. It was hoped that these girls would provide a valuable counterpoint to the perfectionistic girls – a kind of balance mechanism. During the final workshop the girls were asked what they appreciated about having the non-perfectionists in the group and their replies signalled an appreciation for their more tolerant, balanced style. I would predict that an exclusively perfectionistic group of girls would lack the energy and confidence needed to swiftly generate the playful atmosphere needed for Improv. Related to this is the need to provide activities for the non-perfectionists that will persuade them to stay with the programme. Improv was an activity with this pulling power.

12.3 Ideas for future interventions and research

There has been little work done on non-clinical and non-adult perfectionistic populations. In response to this need, the study limited its target population to gifted fourteen year-old girls who volunteered for a programme on 'Life-Long Learning'. The programme suggests the existence of pre-clinical perfectionism, which I have named 'fledgling perfectionism', but this cannot be asserted strongly since it is impossible to know if any of the girls would have gone on to develop 'fully-fledged' perfectionism.

More research needs to be done in the area of intervention, particularly at this pre-clinical level. Shafran (personal communication, 2002) encourages longitudinal studies to follow-up the perfectionistic girls and document the extent to which pathologies associated with perfectionism arise in the sample.

A question raised by a parent of one of the girls in the research was whether perfectionism affects males and females differently. I could not say based on this study, but it would be interesting to conduct a similar intervention with a group of boys to observe the relevance or otherwise of the 'fledgling perfectionist' concept. I wonder if the gender-specific pressures on adolescent

females to be the best in a wide variety of life domains may increase their susceptibility to becoming 'fully-fledged' perfectionists.

An observation made by Amber during a conversation about procrastination in Workshop Five gives a possible direction for taking action now to help 'fledgling perfectionists'. She commented that perfectionists persist with procrastination as a strategy because 'they never have anything bad happen because of it'. The implication is that when teachers, parents and others in supervisory positions ignore procrastination, they collude in the development of perfectionism. It would seem preferable to confront the 'fledgling perfectionist' about procrastination and other destructive strategies by ensuring negative consequences. In this way, the teachers' goal is to teach students how to become life-long learners; the need to value the L (of Learning) in the PLE model as well as the P (of Performance).

Finally, along with work to improve the quality of the intervention, research is needed to explore how such a programme could be widely disseminated. This would involve possibilities to incorporate it within school life.

Comments have been made in this section regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the various techniques used in the intervention. In addition, there are other limitations to be noted with reference to the research. I would identify the need for other perspectives in both observation and interpretation of the girls' behaviour and comments. In particular, during the Improv exercises I was torn between being fully 'in the moment' myself and being an observer of all that was going on. I obviously missed much of what went on in the group.

The length of the programme and total amount of contact time with the girls was limited to just one hour each week over a six week period. The need for supplementary individual time with some of the girls has been noted earlier.

In addition, the sessions occasionally required a little more time than was available from the rigid high school timetable, and therefore more flexibility would be beneficial.

The research group was restricted to gifted girls in Year 10 of their schooling, therefore the assertions made regarding perfectionism cannot be generalised to all populations. Instead, it is hoped that teachers, counsellors and parents who work with girls similar to my study group will find relevant and beneficial material in this report.

The decision to intervene with Year 10 students was made assuming that this would allow perfectionistic tendencies to be addressed before they became rigid. Further research could also test whether this is the best point for intervention and indeed, whether there is a best time that is appropriate to most or all fledgling perfectionists.

A major limitation of the study was the use of measurement instruments that were not specifically designed for the population used. There was qualitative data to suggest that significant positive changes had been made by the girls, but these changes were not reflected in the quantitative measures used (i.e. Burns Perfectionism Scale).

Endnote:

While putting the final touches to this thesis – and for a recovering perfectionist there are many final touches – my 15 year-old son Nick received his NCEA Level 1 results. In 2002, his Year 11 class was the first to sit this new National Certificate of Educational Attainment which replaces the old School Certificate. This year -2003- the girls in the Life-Long Learning Programme will undertake their NCEA Level 1 and, in twelve months time will be receiving results just as Nick has done this past week. For a variety of reasons

I have serious concerns for the fledgling perfectionists having to come to terms with NCEA assessment. Reasons for my concern include:

- The extreme difficulty in getting 'Excellence' – on some tasks 0% achieved excellence
- The complex range of measurement systems used
- The multiple assessments throughout the year
- Multiple grading in every subject that maximise opportunities for failure
- The danger that more classroom focus will go toward assessment (performance) rather than learning or experience
- Confusion in the wider community – including parents – about what results mean, and consequently less meaningful praise

The introduction of NCEA highlights the need for effective intervention with 'fledgling perfectionists' to prepare them for the new challenges inherent in the competency-based system. Without such preparation, NCEA may exact a heavy toll on students; a toll described by Henry James in his novel *The Ambassadors* through the words of his main character Strether, who has been accused by his female companion of being preoccupied with anxiety:

"[My terror] is general, but it avails itself of particular occasions. That's what it's doing for me now. I'm always considering something else; something else I mean, than the thing of the moment. The obsession of the other thing is the terror. I'm considering at present for instance something else than *you*." (p. 13)

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APPENDIX A
ETHICS APPLICATION AND ASSOCIATED INFORMATION
SHEETS/CONSENT FORMS

1.0 DESCRIPTION

1.1 Justification

This proposal is for research which contributes to a masterate programme.

A literature search into reasons for a drop-off in productivity among adolescent girls has identified perfectionism as a major obstacle to continued achievement, especially among the gifted. Perfectionism is linked in the research with low self-esteem, frustration and fear of failure.

Optimal development in school requires the removal of obstacles to learning. Gifted girls who are also perfectionists need help to develop sustainable learning attitudes in order for their full potential to be released. This research charts the development of an intervention designed to provide such help. The intervention is based on improvisational exercises, which run alongside some cognitive modification activities. Six workshops are anticipated that consist of:

- (i) Discussion of perfectionism and sustainable, holistic learning
- (ii) Improvisational drama exercises
- (iii) Group de-briefing of exercises
- (iv) Goal-setting for learning opportunities outside of workshops

1.2 Objectives

- To develop and implement a group intervention programme for gifted and talented adolescent females that combines cognitive, behavioural and affective approaches.
- To observe and describe the effects of the programme.

1.3 Procedures for Recruiting Participants and Obtaining Informed Consent

I intend to request consent from a local girls' high school to run the programme. I have been in contact with one of the Gifted and Talented Co-ordinators at the school and have been using several of her resources in developing the programme to this point. I have also had a meeting with the school Principal to determine her initial level of interest. I will need to forward a copy of my Information Sheet to the Principal and request further approval – including Board of Trustee consent - to approach the Year 10 students. Invitations to participate in the study will be made to girls identified by the school as gifted by their inclusion in a streamed class. While some girls will decline to participate in the study, it is hoped that the final study group will consist of between 15 and 20 girls. An Information Sheet designed for 14- year old girls and their parents will be included with the invitation and Consent form. With the Principal's permission, I anticipate issuing the invitations during a form class when all the girls are together.

The Principal has suggested Friday 8.30 – 9.30 a.m. each week for the 6 one-hour workshops. This is officially outside of school hours so provision will not need to be made to occupy those girls who decline to participate. The Principal pointed out that

various study skills programmes and extension activities are scheduled in this time slot and they are well subscribed to. Provision is made at the school to provide supplementary activities as part of the Gifted and Talented Programme, and my study will readily form part of that provision.

A more accessible title for the study will be used when contacting parents and students: *Becoming a Life Long Learner*. It will be stressed that participation in the study is voluntary and is not linked to any grades or immediate academic merit. Both the Principal and the students will be informed of their right to withdraw at any stage from the study.

1.4 Procedures in which Participants will be involved

An initial consent-gaining phase will be followed with establishment of the research study group. Six one-hour workshops will be held weekly.

The workshops will include the following:

- Assessment of perfectionistic tendencies using the Burns Perfectionism Scale
- Discussion of perfectionism and the need for holistic measures of achievement
- Establishing personal 'failure celebrations'
- Improvisational drama exercises that promote risk-taking, loss of self-consciousness and being 'in the moment'.
- Discussion of how to transfer learnings from improvisation to life outside the workshop
- Pleasure-predicting activity based on Burns Cognitive Therapy approach to perfectionism
- Diary recording after each workshop

A summary of each workshop along with examples of the improvisational exercises is included in appendix six.

1.5 Procedures for handling information and material produced in the course of the research, including raw data and final research report

Some of the discussions with the group will be recorded and analysed for trends rather than fully transcribed. Tapes of the discussions will be kept in the researcher's office in a locked drawer, and destroyed (wiped) at the end of the research examination process.

Participants will be asked to keep a diary of each workshop. The diaries will remain in my possession for security and will be labelled with pseudonyms chosen by the girls, to ensure anonymity to everyone except the researcher. Each pseudonym will correspond to a participant's name on a master list, which will be stored in the researcher's locked drawer. Diaries will be stored separately from the master list of names.

Information gained by the researcher will be compiled into a final report for the Master's thesis. The first and second supervisors will read the report and will be aware of the school involved, however, they will not have knowledge of specific participants or their names. Pseudonyms will be used throughout when writing the

report. The school will not be named unless the Principal gives consent. If the school is named it may lead to general identification of the participant group.

1.6 Procedures for sharing information with research participants

At the conclusion of the research study, a copy of the written report will be given to the school Principal and to the Gifted and Talented Co-ordinators. Parents and participants will be invited to an oral report and discussion evening at school once the study is completed. Participants may also request a written summary of the research findings.

1.7 Arrangements for storage and security, return, disposal or destruction of data

Tapes of any conversations, notes taken by the researcher during the study and the participants' diaries will be stored in a locked drawer in an office. At the end of the research examination process these materials will be destroyed – unless any participant wishes to retain her diary.

2.0 Ethical issues

2.1 Access to participants

Access will be arranged through the Principal of the school (see 1.3), and in consultation with the Board of Trustees. Consent will be sought from parents of any students invited to participate.

2.2 Informed consent

An information sheet will be provided for all participants, parents and teachers involved. Consent forms will need to be signed by parents and participants before commencement of the programme (see attachments 1 and 2).

2.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Participation in the programme will not be anonymous, just as the Gifted and Talented programme is not hidden at the high school nor is it especially publicised. Confidentiality will be assured for all taped conversation material. Names will be changed (pseudonyms used) so that participants cannot be identified individually in subsequent publications.

2.4 Potential harm to participants

An issue to be considered is whether identifying students as having perfectionistic tendencies will adversely affect their self-esteem. An initial review of the literature suggests that labelling is unlikely to cause harm. Most perfectionists know who and what they are, and they are reassured to discover that they are not alone. Students will not be prevented from joining the programme if their perfectionism score is not high

enough – all students who accept the invitation will be included, so there will be no stigmatising based on initial selection scores.

I will contact the school counsellor prior to the study commencing to brief her on the nature of my research. In the unlikely event of a girl being troubled by something in the workshop, I will immediately contact the counsellor and form teacher.

2.5 Potential harm to the researcher

None is foreseen. The researcher's daughter is in her 7th form year (Year 13) at the school, but this is unlikely to impact in any way.

2.6 Potential harm to the University

Again, the research doesn't seem to place the University at any risk, other than the potential for embarrassment if the research is of limited use, or if the process does not engage the students.

2.7 Participants' right to decline to take part

Participants will be invited to join the programme and may exercise their right to withdraw at any stage. During taped discussions the participants can ask for the recorder to be turned off at any stage.

2.8 Uses of the information

The information will be used to complete the research requirements of a thesis for a Master of Arts qualification. It is likely that results of the research will be published in education-based journals and presented at conferences.

2.9 Conflict of interest/conflict of roles

Because the researcher has a daughter at the school there may be some feeling of obligation by the school to participate in the study. The researcher has not been present around the school very much so it is not likely that she will be recognised as a 'girl's mum'.

During the group exercise the researcher will be performing a number of roles. These will include:

- facilitator of group discussions
- teacher of improvisation exercises and holistic learning
- data gatherer for research

At all times, the facilitation and teaching roles will take precedence over the research imperative to gather data. The qualitative nature of the research means these roles are unlikely to conflict. Group discussions will inform the kind of improvisation exercises selected for a workshop, and the diary entries will provide ongoing feedback about the level and nature of the tasks selected.

2.10 Other Ethical concerns

No other ethical issues have been identified at this time.

3.0 Legal concerns

None can be foreseen.

4.0 Cultural concerns

The improvisational drama exercises are designed to be unfamiliar and challenging, yet within the capability of people from all cultures. Proficiency with English is advantageous but not critical to success in the programme, since mime and gesture are also used.

5.0 Other Ethical bodies relevant to this research

No other Ethics committees or professional codes will impact on this research. If the high school has any further requirements for vetting applications from researchers, I will comply with these.

(attachment one)

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

Dear [name of Principal]

Research study into perfectionism among gifted adolescent girls

Thank you for agreeing to consider this proposal for research within [name of school]. I am carrying out the research as part of a Master of Arts programme. I have been a tutor at Massey University for 12 years, where I teach Communication and Management Development within the College of Business. I can be contacted at Massey by phoning 3505799 Extension 2385, or by email at d.ramsey@massey.ac.nz. This research is supervised by Dr Tracy Riley, who can be contacted in the Department of Learning and Teaching at 3505799 Extension 8625 or by email at t.l.riley@massey.ac.nz.

My interest in this subject began after a presentation at your school by [name of Gifted and Talented coordinator], on the subject of perfectionism and how it differed from a healthy striving for excellence. Since then, [name of coordinator] and I have shared resources and some conversations as I have honed my focus for a possible research study. The purpose of the study is to explore and describe the effects of a Cognitive Behaviour and Improvisational Drama programme on a group of gifted adolescent females with perfectionistic tendencies.

A literature search into reasons for a drop-off in productivity among adolescent girls has identified perfectionism as a major obstacle to continued achievement, especially among the gifted. Perfectionism is linked in the research with low self-esteem, fear of failure and frustration.

Optimal development in school requires the removal of obstacles to learning. Gifted girls who are also perfectionists need help to develop sustainable learning attitudes in order for their full potential to be released. This research charts the development of an intervention designed to provide such help. The intervention is based on improvisational exercises, which run alongside some cognitive modification activities. Six workshops are anticipated that consist of:

- (v) Discussion of perfectionism and sustainable, holistic learning
- (vi) Improvisational drama exercises
- (vii) Goal-setting for learning opportunities outside of workshops

Programme objectives are:

- To develop and implement a group intervention programme for gifted and talented adolescent females that combines cognitive, behavioural and affective approaches.
- To observe and describe the effects of the programme.

I am seeking your consent to invite girls from a Year 10 streamed class at [name of school] to participate in 6 one-hour workshops at a time convenient to their schedules. The workshops are highly experiential and are designed to be beneficial to the participants regardless of research outcomes. It is expected that at the end of the exercise, girls will have a better understanding of perfectionism and how it affects their productivity and level of personal satisfaction. As well, they will have explored more sustainable, holistic learning attitudes that contribute to a life-long orientation to learning. With your permission, the workshops will be arranged to take place at school in an available room and at your convenience.

Findings from the study will be fed back to you in a written report and via an oral presentation evening at school, to which parents and girls will be invited. It is my hope that ideas from the report will be readily transferable to the school environment.

In keeping with Massey University's Code of Ethical Conduct for Teaching and Research involving Human Participants, you have the following rights:

- To decline to participate
- To withdraw from the study at any time
- To ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- To provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher
- To be given access to a summary of the findings of the study when it is concluded
- Anonymity and confidentiality

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 02/70. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz.

Please feel free to get in touch with me if you require further information.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Ramsey

“BECOMING A LIFE-LONG LEARNER” RESEARCH STUDY

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name and the name of the school will not be used without my permission.

I agree to the school’s involvement in the research under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

(Attachment two)

RESEARCH STUDY: “BECOMING A LIFE-LONG LEARNER”

Dear

I'd like to invite you to take part in a research exercise I'm conducting at [name of school]. I'm interested in knowing how attitudes to learning, such as perfectionism, affect your success at school and your life-long approach to learning new things. The research explores healthy learning attitudes in 6 one-hour workshops, held on Fridays 8.30 – 9.30 am, which are based around fun, improvisational games. In addition, you will be given a diary and asked to record your impressions after each workshop. The workshops are designed to be an enjoyable experience for you, as well as a useful way for me to further my research.

The objectives for this research are:

- To develop and implement a group intervention programme for gifted and talented adolescent females that combines cognitive, behavioural and affective approaches.
- To observe and describe the effects of the programme.

At the end of the study, I will write up my findings in a report, which will be given to [name of Principal]. In addition, I will make an oral presentation of the findings at a discussion evening at school to which you and your parents will be invited. I will not use anyone's names in the report so all the data will be anonymous. You may request a written summary of the research findings.

Before and during the exercise you will have the following rights:

- To decline to participate
- To refuse to answer any particular questions
- To withdraw from the study at any time
- To ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- To provide information on the understanding that your identity will not be disclosed in the report unless you give permission to the researcher
- To be given access to a summary of the findings of the study when it is concluded
- Confidentiality

You can decide not to participate if you wish. Your participation is not related to any assignments or grades and you will not be disadvantaged if you do not participate. If you would like to know more about what is involved, please contact me.

I have worked at Massey University for 12 years teaching Communication and this research is part of a Master of Arts degree. I can be contacted at Massey, phone 3505799 Ext 2385, or email d.ramsey@massey.ac.nz. My research supervisor is Dr Tracy Riley, who can be contacted at 3505799 Ext 8625, or email t.l.riley@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 02/70. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz.

If you would like to take part, please complete the following consent form and have your parent sign it, then return the form to the school's main office before (insert date).

Deb Ramsey
Researcher

(cut along this line)

“BECOMING A LIFE-LONG LEARNER” RESEARCH STUDY

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

I understand that I may ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time during any taped discussions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission.

I agree to participate in the research.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Parent/Guardian Signed:

Parent/Guardian Name:

APPENDIX B
THE BURNS PERFECTIONISM SCALE

THE BURNS PERFECTIONISM SCALE

Name: _____

Date: _____

Put a tick ✓ in the column that best describes how you think *most* of the time. Be sure to choose only one answer for each attitude. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers to any statements. To decide whether an attitude is typical of you, recall how you look at things *most of the time*.

Attitude	Agree Strongly	Agree Slightly	Neutral	Disagree Slightly	Disagree Strongly
1. If I don't set the highest standards for myself, I am likely to end up a second-rate person.					
2. People will probably think less of me if I make a mistake.					
3. If I cannot do something really well, there is little point in doing it at all.					
4. I should be upset if I make a mistake.					
5. If I try hard enough, I should be able to excel at anything I attempt.					
6. It is shameful for me to display weaknesses or foolish behaviour.					
7. I shouldn't have to repeat the same mistake many times.					
8. An average performance is bound to be unsatisfying to me.					
9. Failing at something means I'm less of a person.					
10. If I tell myself off for failing to live up to my expectations, it will help me do better in the future.					

Any further comments?

APPENDIX C
“LET’S START THINKING”: WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE FOR
WORKSHOP ONE

LET'S START THINKING:

Written Questionnaire for first workshop

Name:

Date:

Before we talk together about our attitudes to learning, I'd like you to think about and respond to the following questions. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers, so please write whatever you think about these questions.

What does it mean to be gifted?

What is the best thing about being gifted?

What does success mean to me?

How will I know if I am successful?

What contributes to my success?

What gets in the way of my success?

How important is it for me to excel?

How important is it for others that I excel?

What would change for me if I stopped getting high grades?

What does it mean to be a perfectionist?

What do I mean by 'perfect'?

Does perfectionism help or hinder my progress? Why/why not?

Have I ever taken subjects I don't enjoy just because I am good at them?

What are my feelings prior to learning something new and challenging?

APPENDIX D

RAW DATA FROM WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE – WORKSHOP ONE

Question: What does success mean to me?

Participant	Comment
<i>The terminator</i>	Achieving my goals
<i>George</i>	Achieving a goal or a high standard
<i>Storm</i>	It depends on what it; in life being successful is how you look at it ie a good job, a family, lots of friends etc
<i>The matrix</i>	Success is being at the top
<i>Maria Favrina</i>	No response
<i>Banana Hammock</i>	Achieving to the best of my ability
<i>Jose</i>	To achieve my goals
<i>Snagglepuss</i>	No response
<i>The luck bear</i>	It is something that helps us move through life without difficulty
<i>Amber</i>	Getting 90% or above 80% is OK
<i>Yoda</i>	Accomplishing something

Question: How will I know if I am successful?

Participant	Comment
<i>The terminator</i>	I will be happy with my achievements
<i>George</i>	If I get a good mark on something or get into a good team and feel like I've done well
<i>Storm</i>	I will be happy with just the way I am and the way I feel
<i>The matrix</i>	If I excel in what I choose to do
<i>Maria Favrina</i>	If I have achieved the goals that I set myself
<i>Banana Hammock</i>	If I feel that I can't have done much better
<i>Jose</i>	I have got to where I want to be
<i>Snagglepuss</i>	Usually that I have good marks on an assessment
<i>The luck bear</i>	Being praised for something I have done
<i>Amber</i>	By others comments, marks on tests, how I feel about myself
<i>Yoda</i>	If I feel I have done something well or if people praise me for it

Question: What would change for me if I stopped getting high grades?

Participant	Comment
<i>The terminator</i>	I would lack ambition and motivation and self-confidence. Future careers would not be possible
<i>George</i>	Maybe I would start to think I couldn't do it and continuously get lower grades
<i>Storm</i>	My self-esteem. I am not a very unsociable person but it is hard for me to make new friends, so all I really have are my grades, they are what keeps me proud of myself
<i>The matrix</i>	Not that much, I would be disappointed in myself
<i>Maria Favrina</i>	Some opportunities, but not all!
<i>Banana Hammock</i>	I would become less interested, or I might try harder to improve
<i>Jose</i>	I would need to put more effort and work into my schoolwork. I would want to do better
<i>Snagglepuss</i>	Probably I would feel kind of stupid and I would reconsider what subjects I want to take
<i>The luck bear</i>	I would start studying and working harder
<i>Amber</i>	My motivation, morale, family life. All around things would probably be disagreeable
<i>Yoda</i>	I wouldn't get rewarded as much from my parents. I probably wouldn't feel as good about myself

Question: What does it mean to be a perfectionist?

Participant	Comment
<i>The terminator</i>	To keep at things until there are no faults
<i>George</i>	Having to be the best at everything and having everything how you want it
<i>Storm</i>	Wanting everything related to you to be 'perfect'
<i>The matrix</i>	Being absolutely satisfied with the result
<i>Maria Favrina</i>	To be 'perfect' in every way
<i>Banana Hammock</i>	To try and make everything perfect, when it doesn't always have to be
<i>Jose</i>	A person who likes things to be perfect, doesn't settle for second best
<i>Snagglepuss</i>	Not to be happy with something until you feel it's done to the best of your abilities
<i>The luck bear</i>	To want everything you do to be done perfectly
<i>Amber</i>	You want everything to be just right
<i>Yoda</i>	To want every single thing absolutely perfect

Question: What do I mean by 'perfect'?

Participant	Comment
<i>The terminator</i>	To be the best possible
<i>George</i>	No mistakes, nothing wrong, highest mark in class
<i>Storm</i>	Right! Good, excellent
<i>The matrix</i>	Being the best in all areas
<i>Maria Favrina</i>	Be everything that other people think is perfect
<i>Banana Hammock</i>	Make everything really good, every detail has to be just right
<i>Jose</i>	As good as it can possibly be
<i>Snagglepuss</i>	100%
<i>The luck bear</i>	All correct, very tidy
<i>Amber</i>	100% good. Just right.
<i>Yoda</i>	Absolutely no mistakes

Question: Does perfectionism help or hinder my progress?

Participant	Comment
<i>The terminator</i>	It helps more than hinders to a certain extent because it makes me try harder
<i>George</i>	I wouldn't call myself a perfectionist from what I think about it
<i>Storm</i>	In most cases it helps but sometimes it just makes me do worse
<i>The matrix</i>	Usually it helps, because my work is to a high standard. But sometimes it hinders because I am not happy with the end result - it isn't as good as I want it to be
<i>Maria Favrina</i>	It hinders because it's not realistic
<i>Banana Hammock</i>	It can help by getting good grades. But it can also hinder because I end up spending so much time on one thing, I don't get to finish anything else
<i>Jose</i>	I think it can help, but too much may slow me down, if I feel I cannot continue until I've got it perfect
<i>Snagglepuss</i>	No response
<i>The luck bear</i>	Hinder because I would spend more time perfecting things than getting them finished
<i>Amber</i>	Help and hinder. Hinder because I put myself down. Help because I always want to do better if it's not perfect
<i>Yoda</i>	Both. If it is perfect you get better marks. But, I don't want to spend time making it look perfect instead of working on quality

APPENDIX E
INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPROVISATIONAL GAMES

Improvisational Games

“Clap around the Circle” This is a warm-up activity that instantly raises the energy level of a group while creating an atmosphere of teamwork and cooperation. Players form a tight circle, then one player starts the activity by looking to the player on her left and clapping her hands. The second player immediately turns to her left, gets eye contact with the next player and claps her hands. In this manner, the ‘clap’ is passed around the circle. At first, the flow of ‘claps’ will be choppy, but as it continues around the circle two or three times, the rhythm becomes even and swift-paced. Emphasis is placed on the energy created by the activity through anticipation and teamwork.

“What are you Doing?” This is a game that encourages risk-taking, commitment to the activity and staying in the moment. Players form a circle. Player A goes into the centre of the circle miming an activity, eg cleaning teeth. Player B jumps enthusiastically into the circle and demands, ‘What are you doing?’ Player A names any action except ‘Cleaning my teeth’. For example, ‘Doing the dishes’. Player A leaves the circle. Player B begins the activity of doing the dishes. Player C jumps into the middle of the circle and asks, ‘What are you doing?’ etc. It is important to not play in order around the circle, as it promotes pre-planned responses and being clever. Players enter at will.

“Shared Story” This game can be played in pairs or in a group. Player A begins to tell a story (title or opening line may be given by coach) and continues until the coach claps his/her hands. At this point, the next player takes up the story – even if it is in the middle of a sentence – and continues until the next clap signal. The time between claps is random, so the players cannot predict when they will enter or leave the story. This game encourages focussed concentration, yielding to offers and a willingness to be altered by what is heard.

“Naming What it’s Not” This warm-up activity brings a freshness of perspective and an openness to new experience. Players break out of habitual interpretations and unconscious responses by becoming totally involved and focussed on the activity. Players are told to march around the room on the signal ‘Go!’ pointing at any and every object and shouting as loudly as possible the wrong name for it (eg. call a chair a dog, call a lightbulb a flower and so on). Eyes are kept wide open and round, as big as possible and after fifteen to twenty seconds of loud chaos they are told to stop.

“Eye Scream” This game is about commitment to a course of action or an idea. It also provides an opportunity to make noise, have fun and enjoy an activity for its own sake. Players form a circle and everyone looks at a point on the floor in the centre of the circle. Everyone counts to three, slowly and in unison. On ‘3!’ everyone looks up and stares directly at another person in the circle. There must be a commitment to one person and one person only. If the person stared at is staring

directly back, those two players scream and step out of the circle. Then the next round begins and the game continues until there are only one or two left in the circle.

“Give and Take” Players form a circle and one spontaneously initiates an action or movement. As other players notice the movement they take it up until someone else initiates a different one. A seamless, fluid and changing circle of movements may ensue as players alternate between taking or ‘offering’ ideas and giving or ‘yielding’ to the ideas of others.

“Questions Only” Players line up in two teams so that one player of each team is involved at one time. The pair are given a setting (eg. at the dentist) and must alternate remarks to build a scene on this topic. Only questions must be asked; if a statement is made, or a comment is repeated, the player is immediately ‘out’ and must retire to the back of the line. The game provides high energy interaction along with multiple exposures to failure and ‘going out’. Players are encouraged to use their ‘failure celebrations’ at every opportunity.

“Accepting Offers” In pairs, the players are given an opening line of dialogue (eg. “I’ve never seen anything like it!”). Players respond to the offer and build a scene, establishing character, relationship, motive and plot. At irregular intervals, the facilitator calls ‘freeze!’ and the players freeze in their positions. A new scene is then created from those frozen positions. All offers (initiatives) need to be accepted and acted on. For many players, the experience of saying yes to all ideas is a new one and is full of risk. At the same time, their own ideas are accepted by their partners and they experience the satisfaction of true collaborative effort.

“Zig, Zag, Zog” Players form a circle large enough for everyone to see each other without having to turn too much. A player begins as she looks at a person across the circle, makes sure to get eye contact, and says “Zig!” The “Zigger” must stand still as she says “Zig!” The person to whom the Zig is directed then looks to another person, gets eye contact, and says “Zag!” being sure to remain still. The one who has just been “Zagged” then gets eye contact with any member of the circle, takes one step toward her, slaps her hands together, points at the person, and says “Zog!”. This is all done in a simultaneous motion. Once the “Zogging” motion is complete, the “Zogger” steps back into the circle. The “Zogged” individual begins the cycle over.

A competitive edge may be added by sending a player out if she makes a “Zog” movement while saying either “Zig!” or “Zag!” or if she fails to make the proper hand and foot movement while “Zogging”.

“Space Jump” Players form teams of four. One player begins by creating a solo scene with action and words, based on a setting suggested by the coach or any of the other players. After 30 seconds the coach claps her hands and calls “Space Jump!” which is a sign for the player to freeze. The 2nd player enters and begins to create a new scene which incorporates the 1st player and her physical position. The scene is played out for another 30 seconds until the coach calls “Space Jump!” and both players freeze. The 3rd player enters and a new scene is built. This continues until all 4 players are in a scene. At subsequent 30 second signals the players leave one at a time in the reverse order they arrived, ensuring that all scenes are revisited. The original player should be left to play out the original scene to a conclusion.

“Death in a Minute” A team of 4 players is given a setting and then they have one minute to create a scene during which one or more players die. The death must be believable within the context and must occur before the minute is concluded.

APPENDIX F

'QUICK QUIZ'

Quick Quiz!

Name:

Date:

Read each statement then put a tick ✓ in the column that best describes how you think *most* of the time. Answer with your **first** thought to get the truest response.

Attitude	Agree Strongly +2	Agree Slightly +1	Neutral 0	Disagree Slightly -1	Disagree Strongly -2
1. I'm critical of people who don't live up to my expectations.					
2. I get upset if I don't finish something I start.					
3. I do things precisely down to the very last detail.					
4. I argue about test scores I don't agree with, even when they won't affect my grade.					
5. After I finish something, I often feel dissatisfied.					
6. I feel guilty when I don't achieve something I set out to do.					
7. When a teacher hands back one of my papers, I look immediately for my mistakes, not at what I did well.					
8. I compare my test scores with those of other good students in my class					
9. It's hard for me to laugh at my own mistakes.					
10. If I don't like the way I've done something, I start over and keep at it until I get it right.					

Now add up your ratings to learn where you fall on the Perfectionism Continuum.

Taken from "What's Bad About Being Too Good?" by Miriam Adderholdt and Jan Goldberg (1999). Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing.

The Perfectionism Continuum:

+15 to +20	Too Good to Be True
+10 to +14	Too Good for Your Own Good
+5 to +9	Borderline Perfectionist
+1 to +4	Healthy Pursuer of Excellence
0 + -5	You're Used to Hanging Loose
-6 to -10	A Little TOO Relaxed

APPENDIX G
PLEASURE-PREDICTING SHEET

PLEASURE - PREDICTING SHEET

Name:

Date:



Activity	Predict how satisfying the activity will be (0 - 100%)	Record how satisfying it actually was (0 - 100%)	Record how effectively you performed (0 - 100%)

APPENDIX H

HANDOUT OF GALLWEY'S 'SUSTAINABLE WORK' MODEL (PLE TRIANGLE)

What is required for a successful journey of life-long learning?

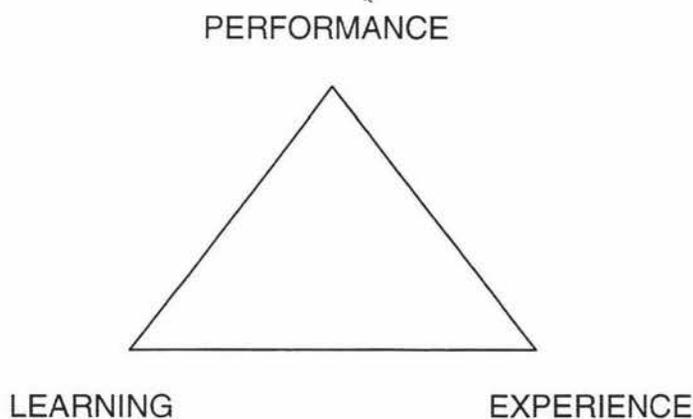
IMAGINE you are the pilot of a small aircraft aiming to complete a long journey. Your success depends on more than your ability to fly the plane. You must do 3 things at once:

- aviate (fly the plane)
- navigate (know where you are)
- communicate (talk to air traffic control and other pilots)

Safe flying means you must do all three things well. If you do only one thing – say 'aviate' – you will be able to focus fully on your flying and do it very well, but attending to just one thing will lead to disaster.

Failure to communicate means you could fly into another aircraft, while failure to navigate might get you lost with no safe place to land.

IT IS THE SAME with success at school. You need to balance 3 important elements if you are to become a successful life-long learner. These elements are:



- PERFORMANCE refers to your ability to do something. At school this is usually measured with assignments and tests. Grades and percentage marks represent someone's judgement of how you *performed* against an accepted standard.
- LEARNING is the way in which you build up your store of skills, knowledge and abilities. Opportunities to learn involve stretching your current ability to meet future demands.
- EXPERIENCE refers to how you feel about the activity you are involved in. What is your quality of life while you are doing it? Are you having fun?

CONSIDER how these 3 elements need to be balanced by a high-school student. Successful study necessarily involves *performing* at an acceptable standard. But very rarely would you start high school with the knowledge and ability needed to pass all the assessment activities that await you. Consequently, you need to engage in *learning* activities that build your capacity. If you begin your course of study with a high level of ability, but give little attention to *learning*, you may find that your performance is acceptable to begin with, and then declines over time. In order to persist with your studies, you also need to enjoy the *experience* you are having. If you are too stressed or too bored, you may not endure to the end, or you may be reluctant to return to learning once the course has finished.

IF YOU HAD TO CONCENTRATE on just one of the three elements, which one would it be?

Most people choose PERFORMANCE. It is easy to see why; your success at school is strongly linked to achievement and grades. It would be hard to go home and say: "I only got 20% on my English exam, mum, but I really had fun!" People can start to think that PERFORMANCE is the only thing that is important. But remember that focus on one element can lead to neglect of the other two. How might you neglect or 'trade-off' LEARNING and EXPERIENCE?

- some students may trade-off *experience* by working long hours so study becomes a grind
- some students may cheat – for instance, handing in someone else's work – which increases grades while trading off *learning*.
- some students may only take subjects in which they are proficient, which ensures good grades but trades off *learning*.
- some students may prefer to only work alone. Group work could improve the quality of their *experience*, but may endanger their *performance*.

This programme is about balancing your achievement in all 3 areas so you can continue to perform new things and to higher levels.

(adapted from Ramsey, P., Franklin, T., Ramsey, D., and Wells, R. (2002). Rethinking Grades for Sustainable Learning, *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 39 (2) 117 – 123)

APPENDIX I

'LOWERING STANDARDS' EXPERIMENT

Name:

What is affected by your perfectionism?

Perfectionism may affect some areas of your life and not others. Read the following list and identify which areas are affected by your perfectionism. Give **one** tick to areas mildly affected by perfectionism, **two** ticks to areas moderately affected, and **three** ticks to areas strongly affected by perfectionism. If you can think of areas not mentioned in the list, please add them at the end.

To determine whether or not an area is affected by your perfectionism, you may wish to ask the following questions:

"Do I set extremely high personal standards in this area?"

"To what extent am I willing to make mistakes/fail in this area?"

"How willing am I to compromise in this area?"

"Do I feel that my sense of self-worth is linked to performance in this area?" (ie "Will I feel less of a person if I fail in this area?")

Area of life	Affected by perfectionism? (one, two or three ticks)
Completing assignments	
Tests	
Keeping room tidy	
Socialising with friends	
Appearance/clothing/hair	
Eating	
Hobby - music, dance etc	
Cooking	
Relationships with teachers	
Relationships with parents	
Sport	
Gardening	
Housework	
Relationship with a boyfriend	
Choosing friends	
Drawing/painting	

Conduct an Experiment:

- Select an area of your life that is mildly affected by your perfectionism (i.e. one tick). Compare your experience in this area when you let perfectionism rule your behaviour and when you place limits on your perfectionism.
- For example: your chosen area might be '*appearance*'. Observe yourself twice in this area. Firstly, allow yourself to fuss and preen for as long as you wish before you go out (to school or to movies etc). Record how much you enjoyed yourself on your outing, how good you felt and how much time it took you to get ready. Secondly, you need to go on a similar outing at another time, but this time you will limit the amount of time and attention you'll give to getting ready. For example, if you took maybe 45 mins to get ready the first time, restrict yourself to 25 or 30 mins this time. Once again, record how much you enjoyed yourself and how good you felt.
- Or, your chosen area might be '*handing in assignments*'. Firstly, let yourself check and recheck your work before you hand it in. Make no effort to change your behaviour in this area. Secondly, place limits on how many times you can revise your work - maybe just 3 rereads? - then hand in the assignment. Compare the outcome from both assignments - both the grade and the experience. Record your impressions.

If you are feeling confident, you may wish to try addressing an area that is moderately affected by your perfectionism (two ticks).

Area Chosen

First experience - impressions

Second experience - impressions

APPENDIX J

TRANSCRIPT OF WORKSHOP ONE GROUP CONVERSATION

42 Yeah.

43

44 Something you can show off about (laughter).

45

46 Builds high self-confidence and you get praised a lot which means you get
47 even higher self-confidence in that particular area.

48

49 I think it's also the support of knowing that you can have something to
50 fall back on eventually.

51

52 Also if you are really good at something it's fun to help other people.

53

54 *Is there anything special about being a gifted girl? Rather than a gifted
55 boy?*

56

57 Back in the olden days it would have been "wow she's not supposed to do
58 that sort of thing but now it's not such a big deal and it doesn't matter if
59 girls are as successful as boys.

60

61 And some people think women are more successful.

62

63 *How do you feel about being gifted girls?*

64

65 Special. Laughter.

66

67 *You didn't know you were gifted?*

68

69 (To another student) What do you expect when you get 90s?

70

71 (Her answer) They're flukes.

72

73 *Do you think maybe your high achievements are flukes? (Answer)*

74 Sometimes.

75

76 *Has anyone ever told you that you might be gifted?*

77

78

79 Yeah some teachers and my friends but they're my friends and they have
80 a biased opinion. (Friends "She doesn't believe us") But I don't know about
81 it, it doesn't really mean anything to me because I set my own standards.

82 (Friend "She's really good at maths and I'm always saying she's really good
83 and she's always saying that she's not")

84

85 *So, you say that you're driven by your own standards. How do you think*
86 *it's different if you were to be labelled 'gifted'.*

87

88 If you go by your own standards you can work better to achieve them
89 because you know what you're aiming at but if you go by what the
90 teachers or the education people set then sometimes it's harder and
91 sometimes it's easier so you're not sure what way to go...

92

93 *So, sometimes the level of the work is harder or easier than you're*
94 *capable of?*

95

96 It depends... some people get gifted by working really hard but you can't
97 really tell that unless you look at people when they're quite young and
98 they have a natural talent for it or whether they've been learning things
99 for ages and they can be quite gifted at it.

100

101 *That's interesting compared to what you were saying before about being*
102 *naturally gifted. So it seems like maybe you're saying you can be naturally*
103 *gifted but some other people are working really hard to get the high ...*

104

105 It should work both ways,

106

107 but most of the time it is the naturally gifted but it is hard to tell unless
108 you take people when they're young.

109

110 Or they could be older but it's just the 1st time they've tried something
111 and they're like really good at it and they don't know in childhood because
112 they've never tried it before.

113

114 I think it's a gift in itself to push yourself to learn something anyway. I
115 think... I mean even if you're working really hard at it, isn't that a gift
116 too... to make yourself ...

117

118 *So, the dedication and conscientiousness... mmm So, it's sounding like*
119 *maybe hard work is involved.*

120

121 It varies I think.

122

123 *So, maybe the last question on that subject. Do you think that gifted*
124 *people shouldn't have to work hard to achieve?*

125

126 No. They probably should work just the same or even harder because
127 they have that gift and they can go that extra bit.

128

129 If they work at it they can reach unfathomable heights and become
130 nuclear scientists and stuff.

131

132 *Tell me about what success means to you.*

133

134 Doing something really well. Achieving something.

135

136 To achieve your goals.

137

138 Yeah, that's what I put. To achieve to the best of your ability.

139

140 *Did anybody write anything different?*

141

142 Depends on how you look at it.

143

144 *How do you look at it?*

145

146 Well, as in what you're wanting to succeed in and also in how you look at
147 it.. people measure success in different ways.

148

149 *How do you measure success?*

150

151 I don't know. Sometimes... usually by my grades and stuff. But sometimes
152 just the way I feel about something.

153

154 *Can you think of an example when maybe it wasn't to do with your grades*
155 *but to do with how you felt about something?*

156

157 Well, in primary school we had a speech competition and the person that
158 got chosen had to say their speech in front of all the adults in assembly
159 and I got chosen to do that and it felt good. ... but I was a little bit
160 embarrassed.

161

162 *If felt good to be honoured in that way?*

163

164 Mmmmm.

165

166 *Most of you thought of high goals?*

167

168 Yeah... or achieving something... that you've been working towards,
169 something that you've done or you've succeeded in doing.

170

171 Might also depend on whether it's your goals or your family's goals or
172 society's goals that they set for you. Maybe the goals your family set for
173 you you can't make those or the other way around.

174

175 *I'm not looking for any particular answers..... I'm really just fascinated*
176 *about what you've got to say. I've been reading about this subject for*
177 *months and it's just really cool to get to be with the people I've been*
178 *reading about and hear it from your own mouths.*

179

180 Do you go round to other schools and ask these questions?

181

182 *No, I'm just doing this study with you girls and hopefully at the end I may*
183 *have a programme that I can offer to the school and maybe other schools*
184 *as well because it's my experience that the gifted and talented are often*
185 *ignored in schools because they tend not to make a lot of trouble. They*
186 *continue to be self-motivated, they achieve highly and ... yeah... and they*
187 *don't get a chance to sit around and talk about the fact they are gifted. I*
188 *didn't know my daughter was in a streamed class for about 3 months when*
189 *she came to Girls High. I had to do a Sherlock Holmes to try and find out*
190 *whether she was.*

191

192 They don't tell you at this school but they do at [Name of single-sex Boys
193 high school]. They tell you exactly which stream you are in?

194

195 *Why do you think they don't tell you?*

196

197 Boys are usually more competitive.

198

199 I think we should be told because it might motivate someone to get into
200 one next year.

201

202 But it shouldn't be quite as ... as [name of boys high school].. it's a bit
203 harsh... they have about 7 streams.

204

- 205 *So, what do you think that's about? Not telling you that you're in a*
206 *streamed class?*
207
- 208 I think girls are more sensitive and some people might get upset, but you
209 find out eventually...
- 210
- 211 You work it out for yourself... oh, we're quite smart, maybe we are a
212 streamed class.
- 213
- 214 *Did any of you have the experience of looking around the class and*
215 *thinking 'wow, they're all smart, how did I get in here?'*
216
- 217 General laughter... yeah.
- 218
- 219 *Would you prefer to be told?*
220
- 221 Yeah (all) cos it just let's know where you're at instead of like....
222
- 223 Although it's kind of fun doing a bit of digging. They don't officially say
224 you're in a streamed class... they say you're in a high bandwidth.
225
- 226 Or Mrs [name of teacher] ... you're in a narrow band class. Or they say
227 "because of the nature of your class".
228
- 229 I asked 'are we streamed?' and she said 'oh, I don't know' . Are we
230 freaks??
231
- 232 *I wonder do any of you get the feeling that it's something that you should*
233 *keep secret or that ... you shouldn't really talk about. You said earlier that*
234 *being gifted was something to be proud of...*
235
- 236 You should be proud of it but you shouldn't rub it in people's faces. You
237 should be a little bit modest.
238
- 239 Lot's of people ask 'are you in a streamed class?' and I just say 'yes'
240 because I don't think it's that big of a deal.
241
- 242 Yeah, they say the 'brainy class' but it's just...
243

244 The people in the other classes sometimes make you feel a bit stink. "Are
245 you in one those brainy classes?" and if you say yes they kind of make you
246 feel stink about it.

247

248 They treat you like goody goods.

249

250 *How does that make you feel?*

251

252 Annoyed. All you're trying to do is get the best out of high school and
253 stuff.

254

255 Kind of excluded. They make you feel that you're set aside from them a
256 bit.

257

258 Extension and stuff is fun. You get extra privileges. You get to watch
259 debates and stuff.

260

261 I hate debates... they're so boring. They use big words....

262

263 Extension class gets to go on a zoo trip and stay the night.

264

265 *What would change for you if you stopped getting high grades?*

266

267 It would be stink... some opportunities. Kids in streamed classes have
268 different opportunities to kids from other classes.

269

270 *Anything else?*

271

272 I'd have to rethink what subjects I was going to take. If I did it once or
273 a couple in a row then it would start making my life suck and I'd think I'd
274 never get high grades again.

275

276 Like your self-esteem might change.

277

278 I'd start trying harder but if I stopped getting high grades in everything
279 and everything I did didn't work I'd start lacking ambition and motivation
280 and self-confidence. (you'd just stop caring) And it would get worse and
281 worse and worse until...

282

283 And my future career possibilities ... I wouldn't be able to do them
284 anymore.

285
286 (They'd go down the drain).
287
288 *[George] you said that you'd just stop caring anymore...*
289
290 If you got all bad grades in all your subjects but I think it would affect
291 me like that. I'd just think I can't do it so why try?.. I would try but you'd
292 lack motivation.
293
294 Can I ask something totally off the topic?
295
296 *Yes, [Amber].*
297
298 Where does your last name originate from?
299
300 *(Researcher answers briefly)*
301
302 *What does it mean to you to be a perfectionist?*
303
304 To be perfect at everything. The best you can do at everything. The best
305 of your ability.
306
307 *Is that the same as what you said? Because you said it was to be perfect*
308 *at everything?*
309
310 It's kind of different. Best is being better than everyone else but
311 perfect is just being perfect not measuring to anyone else.
312
313 *Is that what you meant by best? Did you mean the best you can be or ...*
314
315 Well, nothing's perfect, but as close to perfect as you can be.
316
317 To be a perfectionist is like you're always unhappy with what you've got
318 'cos nothing can be perfect and you're always striving for better.
319
320 I think being a perfectionist is being the best you can. I mean doing
321 things well.
322
323 I think it's keeping at something until there are no faults at all which is
324 actually a bit tricky...
325

326 Can be a good thing but it can be a bad thing.
327
328 And being completely satisfied with the result.
329
330 *To need to be completely satisfied or to be completely satisfied?*
331
332 You just... someone else might do something and not be completely
333 satisfied but just think it's OK. Like an essay or something...
334
335 Like a cake you are making in art.
336
337 *Have we hooked into a specific instance?*
338
339 Yeah, making a cake in art... out of cardboard.
340
341 [The Matrix]'s stuff always turns out really good 'cos she's really artistic
342 but to get there she goes through every little step perfectly, like um her
343 cake is like circles and one, I think it was the top one or the middle one
344 was a bit higher than the top one and she was just worrying about it.
345
346 It was when I was trying to do a picture and I tried to do it a different
347 way about 7 times.
348
349 *What made you give up in the end?*
350
351 I didn't give up in the end. I thought this is as good as I'm going to get so
352 I'll have to stop or it will take forever.
353
354 *Were you happy with it?*
355
356 Sort of.
357
358 *Do you think you could have made it better if you'd spend more time?*
359
360 If I'd spent more time I probably would have ...
361
362 *You could still be at it couldn't you?*
363
364 You keep going on things forever and forever!
365

366 *What is perfect?*

367

368 A very difficult thing to explain.

369

370 Depends on what it is.

371

372 A picture or a book it depends on how you feel about it. But a test, it's
373 more like getting 100%.

374

375 With a picture it could be your opinion.

376

377 *Do you think perfectionism helps you or hinders you?*

378

379 Hinders, because it's not very realistic. I'd say both. I think to have an
380 element of perfectionism in you I think it helps you strive to make things
381 better.... But not too much or you'll keep obsessing over one thing and you
382 can't continue on.

383

384 And you put yourself down if you can't get it perfect.

385

386 You've got to know when to stop.

387

388 *What were you going to say [The Matrix]?*

389

390 I forgot. Oh, yeah, it helps, because you always work to a high standard.

391

392 These are difficult questions.

393

394 *Good. Have you ever taken a subject you don't enjoy because you know you
395 are good at it?*

396

397 Usually I enjoy a subject if I'm good at it. It's only usually the
398 compulsory subjects we have to do regardless of whether we're good at
399 them.

400

401 For our options we had to choose one art subject which was out of music,
402 drama or visual art and some people aren't artistic, namely me, and I had
403 to choose one. ('You're not that bad')

404

405 *Did you say you had chosen a subject... was it you [The Terminator]?*

406

407 I don't like PE and up until last year I hated maths because I thought I
408 sucked at it I probably didn't but I'd get more and more frustrated if I
409 thought I couldn't do something. And I really wanted to quit or not go to
410 school or miss out on maths.

411

412 *You weren't getting the marks in maths that you were getting in other*
413 *subjects?*

414

415 It's like when I was little I was horrible at spelling.

416

417 *Did someone else say they took a subject ?*

418

419 I took Japanese because I took it in Form 2 and I got the Japanese prize
420 because like nobody took it and I just tried a bit, and I ended up getting
421 the Japanese prize and then I felt obligated to do it in 3rd form. I though
422 I can't just waste it and I did it all 3rd form and all of this year too and it
423 is really boring and dull. I don't know about the rest of you... it is just not
424 me. I'm quite annoyed.

425

426 BELL RINGS

427

428 *How do you feel before you are about to embark on something new and*
429 *challenging? Something you've not done before.*

430

431 Depends. If you don't understand the previous work, then it's 'I can't
432 learn new stuff!'

433

434 *So, you need to know the background or the foundation for it.*

435

436 If you understand the stuff you have just been learning before you can
437 start something else...

438

439 *So you have to know something familiar before you can learn something*
440 *new. How do you feel if you don't know that stuff?*

441

442 Scared. Incomplete. Like you haven't completed it. You feel confused.

443

444 I don't really like doing new stuff because it's like 'oh, my God, what if I
445 can't do it' or what if I don't like it and it's not always just... I dunno... if
446 I'm trying something new it's 'can I do this, am I going to like it?' and until
447 I find out what it's like I'm always 'Oh, I don't want to do this'.

448

449 I kept trying different sports 'cos I'm not a particularly outgoing or
450 sporty person and each time I've tried something, I've, at the beginning,
451 I've been like "Oh no, what if I suck completely. Everybody's going to hate
452 me for stuffing up the games and losing and stuff. I tried cricket last
453 year and I can't bowl. I can stay in but I can't hit the ball and I've tried
454 hockey and I was OK at that but I only did it for a little whileand I'm
455 too scared to be competitive because I feel like I'll be letting everybody
456 down if I can't actually do it.

457

458 *Were you going to say something (name of girl)?*

459

460 I was going to say I'm the complete opposite of (name of girl). I don't
461 really think about those factors, I just take it step by step.

462

463 *(name of girl) You said before that you feel excited when about to learn
464 something new. You don't feel like your stomach drops to the pit of your
465 pelvis... It's like 'bring it on!'*

466

467 I try to think to the end of it ... what I'm going to be like then and if I
468 think 'nuh, it's not going to work out' then I don't like it so much, but if I
469 think it can really help me then that's cool.

470

471 *Thank you very much. How much do you like to fail?*

472

473 Not at all.

474

475 *Put your hand up now if you like to fail.*

476

477 It depends in what. If you still got the highest then it doesn't matter.
478 Like if you got 49% and if everybody failed but it was still the highest
479 mark in the class it wouldn't matter.

480

481 *So as long as it's the BEST fail?*

482

483 Laughter. If you failed and everybody else passed then you'd feel stink...

484

485 Sometimes you are really bad at something (like a computer game) but you
486 just keep going and going because you want to fail with style.

487

488 *Next week we'll look at celebrating failure*

APPENDIX K

TRANSCRIPT OF WORKSHOP FIVE GROUP CONVERSATION

TRANSCRIPTION OF WORKSHOP FIVE CONVERSATION:

Friday, 18th October, 2002

How did you go [Amber]?

My sister and I went up to Rotorua on our own to visit our Aunty. We went up on the bus ourselves and came back on the bus ourselves and we decided that we hate buses.

Why is that?

They are uncomfortable, they make you feel sick and all the rest of it. We went lugging, which was really fun, we went swimming several times.. we went to Tauranga and did some shopping and stuff like that.

That sounds like it was just kicking back and having a good time. And how did you feel about that? What kind of things...

(filling in late comers...) What can you remember about the term 'galumphing'? [Banana Hammock]?

When you do something for no particular reason at all.

Like hopping instead of walking etc..... Some of you were going to do something just for fun... or you were going to do something in an ordinary way.. anyone?

How do you do that?

That's a good question.

What is ordinary?

What do you think?

I think everybody sees themselves as different and then sees a large group of other people as ordinary, but maybe that's because they don't know them well. I think everyone has a different idea of ordinary.

41 *For those of you with perfectionistic tendencies, we're going to talk*
42 *about areas of your life where they may be stronger. You may know that*
43 *you give more attention to some things than non-perfectionistic people do.*
44 *Maybe with assignments, you might check and recheck many times. You*
45 *know you do this 25 times while most other people do it 3 times or none??*
46 *You know that your behaviour is different, more intense. .. maybe people*
47 *say you're a bit obsessive about the checking? I did an experiment with*
48 *myself yesterday... my husband and I are writing an article together ... he*
49 *made last corrections then asked should he send it off or did I want a*
50 *last look at it. What do you think I said? [Storm]?*

51
52 From your expression you wanted to look!

53
54 *That was my strong feeling. Because he always confuses their with*
55 *there... and people reading the article will think we're morons... and my*
56 *name is on the article.. and he has no attention to detail especially when*
57 *he just wants to get it sent off... I really need to look at it again... then I*
58 *stopped and I thought... is that my perfectionism talking? What can*
59 *happen? The article has already been accepted.. nothing's going to change*
60 *really.. I'm proud of the article, so what if there's a their instead of a*
61 *there.. it's not worth disrupting my day...and I broke free and said 'send*
62 *the thing!'. Who can identify with what I'm talking about? Yes, [The*
63 *Matrix]... you can. Why? What are you telling yourself?*

64
65 It might not be good enough. It depends on who you're working with.
66 Someone like my brother I'll say "no, I have to check it".

67
68 *What would you have done [Storm]?*

69
70 I would have wanted to check it myself because it depends on how much
71 you can trust the other person. If you know they're capable enough to do
72 that thing on their own.

73
74 *Otherwise, what's involved? What are the issues? What's at stake for*
75 *you?*

76
77 Your reputation I guess. Your own feeling of accomplishment.

78
79 *You too [Amber]. You'd have checked it?*

80

81 I see it with my sister as well. She does all these projects at primary
82 school, works in groups and always ends up doing more than half the work
83 herself instead of leaving things to others. Mum keeps saying that
84 sometimes in these situations you need to just forget about it and leave it
85 to the other people even if you don't get good marks.

86

87 *What is it like to hear that though?*

88

89 It's easy to say it not to do it. I have to work very hard in graphics and in
90 Drama where we do group work not to boss people around and try to do it
91 my way. I'm always doing that unfortunately.

92

93 *Group work is tough - especially for bright students. You might find it
94 difficult when you work in mixed ability classes*

95

96 It's easier in the streamed classes because I know others are smart too.
97 They can do things to a high standard. And if they don't, well they're my
98 friend so it's OK.

99

100 *Can anyone think of any good big mistakes you've made in the past few
101 weeks?*

102

103 I left my MDB (maths development band) until the last week. I had gotten
104 the deadline last term at the end so I told myself I'm going to work on it
105 in the holidays. The holidays came and went and I hadn't done anything.
106 Then I came back to school and suddenly "Oh, MDB is due on Friday" and
107 so I was kind of panicking and I worked really hard. But it turned out OK
108 because sometimes I think I work better under pressure.

109

110 *How did you feel about the quality of what you did?*

111

112 I think it could have been better if I'd started in the holidays.. I could
113 have had more information.

114

115 I just do projects when I feel they're needed

116

117 *Who would say they were a procrastinator?*

118

119 Yes. EVERYONE RAISES HAND.

120

121 *Who feels that it's chronic?*

122
123 My German project was due last term and I still haven't handed it in.
124
125 As long as I start the night before it's alright.
126
127 Everything I do is displacement activity!
128
129 I still end up doing it and getting it in when it's supposed to be in but I
130 leave it...I don't leave it until the last day, but I know when I'm supposed
131 to be working on it and I'm doing something like playing on the computer
132 and I keep telling myself I have to do such and such but I don't end up
133 doing it.
134
135 *Can you put yourself into that situation as if you had something you really*
136 *ought to be doing and you're doing this as a kind of displacement activity...*
137 *what is it that you tell yourself?*
138
139 That you're going to take AGES doing what you're doing.
140 The displacement activity? Why? What do you tell yourself about the
141 task that you ought to be doing?
142
143 It's too hard... you don't know how... it's boring.
144
145 It's just getting started I think [Amber]
146
147 *That's interesting, so sometimes it's because But [Amber] is saying*
148 *sometimes it doesn't have to be any of that... it's just a matter of getting*
149 *started.*
150
151 Once you're started... the first 5 minutes... if you do one thing then leave
152 it you want to go back and finish it... I have to finish what I start.
153
154 Why?
155
156 I don't know. I don't like half doing things.
157
158 I do that sometimes, but it's contradictory, because I have some art
159 works in my room that are unfinished.
160

161 *So, the longer you leave things the more pressure there is and the more*
162 *difficult it gets.. .cos whenever you do things under pressure you're tense,*
163 *you're stressed..*

164
165 ...and you feel like you have do it real fast

166
167 *...do it real fast... and you don't do your best work. Wouldn't you think*
168 *you'd learn? But something more is involved isn't it. It's not just "this isn't*
169 *a good strategy" "I know, I'll take a much more useful strategy in future"*

170
171 You never have something really bad happen because of it...

172
173 ...you might be doing something you enjoy more... or you have to go to the
174 library to research..

175
176 *What if it's about something cool? You're looking forward to it.. do you*
177 *have the same reluctance to get started on it?*

178
179 Depends how... graphics assignment means I have to sketch a playground
180 but that means going out of my way...

181
182 Once you get to the playground you can play on the swings!

183
184 *Let me tell you about David Burns experience when he was daunted by*
185 *starting activities. He started jogging... lives in a hilly region... had to stop*
186 *and walk... each day...he says he has been successful despite his*
187 *perfectionism not because of it. He did an experiment to lower his*
188 *standards rather than raise them...*

189
190 *(explanation of lowering goals leading to outstanding performance)*

191
192 *He aims to run less distance each day.*

193
194 So he can do more because he's not trying to!

195
196 *Exactly. He ends up doing more because he's not trying so hard... imagine*
197 *lying in bed dreading the long run ahead..... my experience with research..*
198 *I love it but it has started to loom like a scary monster.... He suggests*
199 *setting a small achievable goal.... Academic writing..... do what you*
200 *HAVE to do first.*

201

202 You feel good because you've done more than you had to.

203

204 I think I did that last night when I was supposed to be going to sleep. ... I
205 was doing English, writing and stuff on Billy Elliot. I wanted to do a little
206 bit more, just a couple more sentences before I went to sleep and it was
207 really cool.

208

209 Lower your standards!

210

211 *Of course David Burns is not advocating becoming lazy or unproductive or*
212 *low achievers.. all you girls are high achievers and there's no way you won't*
213 *achieve highly as you long as you keep on thinking in healthy ways about*
214 *your learning. But he's saying that sometimes you have to kind of trick*
215 *yourself because you have immensely high expectations for yourself and*
216 *sometimes it's like dumping a big fat toad on top of you and you can't see*
217 *your way through... Lift it off by setting an achievable standard.*

218

219 ([The Luck Bear] demonstrates shooting the toad off her shoulder)

220

221 *That's what you'd do [Luck Bear] isn't it? If you had a toad on you you'd*
222 *just blast it off. Some of us feel that the toad is justified in some way...*
223 *our thinking isn't as healthy as yours.*

224

225 I have healthy thinking??

226

227 *Absolutely. The burden feels just like a toad to those people whose*
228 *perfectionism debilitates them. Interesting thing found is that some*
229 *perfectionists feel that the heavy burden of the 'toad' is a sign that*
230 *they're doing things right, that they're suffering... things ought to be*
231 *hard and if I'm feeling under pressure all the time then I'm doing what's*
232 *right, I'm working hard. You're nodding [Storm]?*

233

234 I always feel like that. I always work so hard...I feel that I'm working
235 harder and achieving my goals when I'm under pressure to do it. Because
236 when I'm not under pressure I keep thinking 'oh, it doesn't matter, it's ok
237 if I don't do it'.

238

239 *So that feeling of being bowed down, of being under pressure... it feels*
240 *good? It feels normal?*

241

242 Yeah.

243

244 I hate that feeling, it's nagging at you... eating away at you ... like "Do it,
245 do it, do it"

246

247 You're on the computer and you think 'I really should be... just 5 more
248 minutes, oh, I should be getting off..'

249

250 *What were you saying [Storm]?*

251

252 I remember reading somewhere about [Name of school] before I came
253 into 3rd form that you have an hour and a half of homework a night. I
254 went home and I only could do 20 minutes and that's finishing everything
255 I could, and I thought 'that's weird, am I not getting enough work load or
256 am I just doing everything really badly?' It was weird for me. I didn't
257 know what was happening. I was expecting a lot more and when I didn't
258 get it I felt strange... like..

259

260 *.. like you weren't working hard enough?*

261

262 Yeah.

263

264 I had the exact opposite of that. I took way more time than everybody
265 else to do things and I was thinking 'what's wrong with me, am I slow or
266 am I thick?' Am I not doing it fast enough?

267

268 *My friend has a son in 3rd form... HW until midnight. Rubbing things out...*

269

270 *Been there done that. [The Matrix]*

271

272 HAND OUT AREAS OF LIFE AFFECTED BY PERFECTIONISM

273

274 That's what I'm doing now.

275

276 *What's that?*

277

278 Everything... everything is affected... I've been noticing that lately that
279 everything I do is affected by perfectionism. It's driving me nuts.

280

281 *You're noticing it everywhere? I noticed it when I did the dishes! I have a
282 certain order for doing the dishes..*

283

284 Yeah! It's all the little things - everything is affected by it.
285
286 I do it in an order that makes sense...
287
288 *[Secret Squirrel] has just said that she has an area of Music that has to*
289 *be perfect, you can't muck it up and of course there are some things- like*
290 *brain surgery where high performance is important. But how do they get*
291 *there?*
292
293 Music is like composing where there is no right or wrong it's just your
294 feeling of what is perfect.
295
296 How can eating be affected by perfectionism?
297
298 Like if you can't mix your food and stuff.
299
300 *(Explanation of experiment)*
301
302
303

APPENDIX L

TRANSCRIPT OF WORKSHOP SIX GROUP CONVERSATION

TRANSCRIPTION OF WORKSHOP SIX CONVERSATION:

Thursday, 24 October 2002

1
2
3
4
5 *Does anyone have any reaction to redoing the burns perfectionism scale?*
6 *[Amber]?*

7
8 I got for # 6 that it is shameful for me to display weakness or foolish
9 behaviour. They are different things. I only just figured this out.
10 Weakness is a bad thing as far as mind set goes for me. But foolish
11 behaviour - I do that quite a lot of the time..

12
13 *Like zany behaviour?*

14
15 Yeah, acting totally stupid.

16
17 *What is weakness to you?*

18
19 Like not achieving something or doing something that you should be able
20 to do, or ...

21
22 That someone else expects you to do ([Bob])

23
24 *Ok, so maybe others expect or you expect*

25
26 But also comparing yourself with others - I know I compare myself with
27 [Storm] all the time. Weakness is also emotional weakness - like you might
28 have a thing with heights - not challenging yourself to go and do things -
29 it depends what the thing is

30
31 *So it could be an emotional weakness, you're frightened of something, you*
32 *can't cope with something - like pressure? Would that be a weakness if*
33 *you couldn't cope with the pressure - you can't hack it?*

34
35 It's like the Truman show - they had done his dad so he had drowned and
36 Truman saw him and he was afraid to cross the water ever after -but
37 then he challenged himself to go across to challenge that weakness

38
39 *So that's a cool thing an honourable thing?*

40
41 It's a made up thing, a TV programme

42

43 I know that

44

45 *What about someone who doesn't think that way at all? That to display a*
46 *weakness is not a shameful thing? [Secret Squirrel]?*

47

48 Everybody has areas they can't do as well as others - we're not perfect.

49

50 *So you wouldn't attach shame to it? What about you [Luck Bear]?*

51

52 I think weakness is a hurdle we can all get over and so it doesn't matter.

53 Some people get over their hurdles before other people do.

54

55 *So, are you saying that everyone is at different stages in overcoming*
56 *their weaknesses?*

57

58 It's a human trait.

59

60 *Put your hand up if you have no weaknesses? Don't you dare [George], or*
61 *we'll all start pointing them out!*

62

63 *How do you feel if someone else displays their humanness or stuffs up?...*

64

65 It makes you feel better.

66

67 *What's that about? Why's that?*

68

69 It means you're not the only one.

70

71 *[George]?*

72

73 Sometimes it makes you frustrated like playing a game with my sister
74 because she can't do some things and I get annoyed with her because she
75 can't do them..

76

77 But then they cry and you feel bad...

78

79 *Was there anything else from filling this out again?*

80

81 My answers were really different this time. Maybe because I don't know
82 the answers to any of these so I'm just making them up.

83

84 *Are you saying that on the day you feel a little different...*

85

86 One day they could be this and another day something is different ...

87

88 *What would be really interesting would be to compare scores... (tell about*
89 *the oral presentation).*

90

91 Maybe I'm in a positive mood because I've got more positive ones than
92 last time. [George]

93

94 The other thing is, we actually know what the score is ...

95

96 *You know how to score so you're more sophisticated about the test.*

97

98 I'm just not thinking about my responses today ... I can't explain

99

100 *Did you respond more intuitively today than before?*

101

102 I'm not sure what I think most of the time

103

104 Because you can't think about thinking... ([Bob])

105

106 *It's really hard because your underlying beliefs and attitudes are often*
107 *invisible to you, that's why they're underlying. You may not know why you*
108 *do something, but exploring your underlying beliefs can be quite liberating*
109 *- that's why also it's hard - that was the most common word you told me*
110 *after the workshop, in your diaries and in the conversation "this is*
111 *HARD", "these questions are HARD to answer". 14 yr olds don't often get*
112 *confronted with these questions.*

113

114 Everyone thinks we're too immature to answer these questions properly so
115 no-one even bothers - they just say "oh, kids" [The Terminator]

116

117 *At school everything is driving toward your grades, your qualification and*
118 *so as long as you're producing the goods it may not be obvious that we*
119 *need to be talking about your attitudes to learning, how do you cope with*
120 *failure, how do you view success? Because, once you leave High School*
121 *you've got the rest of your life to be a learner in and you have to be able*
122 *to sustain it. And some of you have an intensity - [Amber] we know, and*
123 *[Storm] a little and sometimes maybe [The Matrix] - about the work that*

124 *you do, which frankly will mean you burn out if you carry that intensity*
125 *into everything you do forever. And I think now is probably a good time to*
126 *mention that having both PFs and non PFs here is a perfect combination.*
127 *Can those who feel they have PF tendencies share some of the value of*
128 *having the [The Luck Bears] around? What do they bring?*

129
130 They balance you out.

131
132 *How? What do they contribute?*

133
134 Elf ears!

135
136 They help you see some stuff just isn't important [Bob]

137
138 They don't really care too much and they're fine and stuff [The Matrix]

139
140 *The vision of [LuckBear] shooting that toad off her shoulder is priceless.*
141 *You guys bring a lightness and a lack of intensity and humour and a*
142 *perspective a balance.*

143
144 Some people can be laid back and stuff and they do things and their work
145 is cool. But the perfectionist goes and tries to make it all perfect but
146 they end up stuffing it up and the other person's work is better!

147
148 *And you know why don't you? Because remember the guy wanting to go for*
149 *a run getting tense etc and you can't do your best work when you're tense*
150 *and when you're trying really hard you can't do it. That's why he started*
151 *setting those ridiculously mediocre goals for himself.*

152
153 Like tennis. Try hard to hit the ball hard and it goes into the net or you
154 really hit it hard and it goes out or long.

155
156 *By trying hard you disconnect yourself from the process, your muscles*
157 *are so tense and you can't do anything. What were you saying [Secret*
158 *Squirrel]?*

159
160 Music. Especially in concerts and stuff. I've got one tonight and I'm going
161 to be so nervous and I'll probably make lots of mistakes because I'm
162 nervous.

163

- 164 *So often in exams performance is sometimes not the best because you've*
165 *got all that added stress.*
166
- 167 I used to play the clarinet but I quit because I couldn't do it any more - it
168 got too hard and I panicked too much.
169
- 170 (general chaos)
171
- 172 *Can I just ask you some of the questions from our first conversation -*
173 *one was "What does success mean to me?"*
174
- 175 Achieving my goals, my personal goal and other people's goals [The
176 Terminator]
177
- 178 Getting the same in a test as [Storm]
179
- 180 *There's still comparison isn't there*
181
- 182 Some people don't understand it - like friendly competition [George] They
183 think 'why does it matter?'
184
- 185 *Do you remember we talked about the 3 different things it is important*
186 *to give attention if we are to become life-long learners? Remember with*
187 *my flying the plane I had to aviate, navigate and communicate. Three*
188 *things... What were the three things you need to be a life-long learner?*
189
- 190 Performance, Experience and Learning...
191
- 192 *And tell me what they are... Performance is what?*
193
- 194 How well you do.
195
- 196 *The grade you get... whether you beat [Storm] or she beats you... the*
197 *number, the percentage you get or the qualification you get... it's the*
198 *outcome and that's what school seems to be about, right? What about*
199 *experience?*
200
- 201 The fun.
202
- 203 *It's the quality of your life when you're doing something. What about*
204 *learning?*

205

206 It's learning something new every day.

207

208 *What does it mean to learn?*

209

210 To find out things... to take in knowledge

211

212 *To learn new skills, so that means before you learn it you didn't know it,*
213 *right? So it's about not-knowing stuff and that means sometimes you're*
214 *going to look foolish... you'll fail. Think of a baby learning to walk... and*
215 *what happens to them a lot of the time?*

216

217 They fall

218

219 *Absolutely. Once they've fallen, what do they do?*

220

221 They get right up.

222

223 They sometimes cry.

224

225 They're too young to understand shame [Snagglepuss]

226

227 *So shame is something we learn, that accompanies us falling over or*
228 *making a mistake.. we learn it*

229

230 That's why kids run around naked... [The Terminator]

231

232 *What do you think of the performance triangle? What I'm saying is as*
233 *people with perfectionistic tendencies - we can't expect just to ask them*
234 *to lower their standards. A lot of people treat perfectionists that way...*
235 *they say "you're too hard on yourself [Storm], lighten up, ease up, go easy*
236 *on yourself... aim for 60%, and [Storm] sits there smiling beautifully at*
237 *me thinking "you must think me mad". It doesn't work for perfectionists*
238 *to tell them to stop being perfectionistic. But instead, what I'm trying to*
239 *say to you is to keep your standard high, AND keep your standards high*
240 *for learning... you're sometimes going to fail a test because you don't know*
241 *the stuff. Keep your standards high for your experience... value your*
242 *quality of life and if aiming for perfection of performance is ruining your*
243 *quality of life sometimes you need to put more into that. So it's a matter*
244 *of broadening or raising your standards in 3 areas, not just performance.*

245 *And that gives you the well-rounded attitude to learning. Does that make*
246 *sense?*

247

248 Does it count if you think you've done enough maths work and you decide
249 you don't want to take your book home when other people are taking their
250 books home?

251

252 *Do you need to take your book home to do more work or do you believe*
253 *you've done enough?*

254

255 I still get by.

256

257 *Then why would you take your book home?*

258

259 Just in case.

260

261 Don't take it. It makes my bag too heavy! And cuts the circulation off in
262 my shoulder! [The Luck Bear]

263

264 *I guess your question [Amber] is related to "is there a sense of I*
265 *SHOULD take my book home, I OUGHT TO"?*

266

267 No, it's more like, does the experience mean actually doing it and having
268 the experience of doing it, or not doing it and going and doing something
269 fun? What's the 'experience' - actually doing the work and having fun or
270 just leaving it when you know you can..

271

272 *Put it this way, if you felt you'd done enough for your maths, but you took*
273 *the book home 'just in case', and 'I probably should because everybody*
274 *else is, and I might just do some more... but you really wanted to bake*
275 *muffins, or watch TV or listen to your new CD that night... and you didn't...*
276 *even though you felt you'd done enough maths, you're starting to erode*
277 *your quality of life in order for probably unnecessary obsessing about*
278 *maths.*

279

280 So the experience is when you're doing the work and when you're not
281 doing the work... when you think nuh..

282

283 (so many words!!!! - (from everyone)) I'm thinking too much again!

284

285 *Yeah, and yet you're making a useful distinction [Amber]. I hear what*
286 *you're saying. Yes, it's all around the decisions - everything about the*
287 *decision, whether you do it, how much you do it, when you do it- all those*
288 *things are involved in the experience. Make sense?*

289

290 Most of the time I take my maths book home and I don't end up doing
291 anything, so I've given up taking it home. [George]

292

293 Do you ever listen to these tapes at home and think "wow, I said
294 something really smart!?" [Snagglepuss]

295

296 *No, I really think you guys say the smart stuff. Last week we talked for*
297 *maybe 25 mins and it took me about 2 hours to transcribe everything -*
298 *it's fascinating.*

299

300 *In what ways does perfectionism affect you?*

301

302 Depends if you're a perfectionist or not. If you're not, then you probably
303 just get annoyed by everyone else around you having high standards -
304 being a perfectionist. (Bob)

305

306 *Oh, that's interesting. So, what's it like to be in a group with a*
307 *perfectionist? [Luck Bear]?*

308

309 I just get over it. It's their life... and there's always [George]!

310

311 I'm not in your class! (George)

312

313 At lunch and stuff when they talk about what they did in class and they
314 ask 'what did you do' and I'm just blah blah. (The Luck Bear)

315

316 *So, for you lunchtime is time out?*

317

318 Yeah. (The Luck Bear)

319

320 It's quite funny when people spend all their spare time talking about what
321 questions they got wrong and what to do about it. It's like 'have a break'
322 Do your work in class. It makes your friends cross. For all you know they
323 might not care about test results and stuff and you're just getting them
324 angry. (The Terminator)

325

326 *Interesting point - even if you're not a perfectionist, just to be around*
327 *them, if they're obsessing, can really put you off hanging out with them,*
328 *and for people with clinical perfection, this becomes a problem because*
329 *relationships are hard to maintain because sometimes the perfectionism*
330 *spills over and they start to expect it of other people.*

331

332 It's good to be in groups with perfectionists because they want to get a
333 good mark, they take the Japanese House home! [George]

334

335 *Who did that?*

336

337 No one. It's a made up story! [George]

338

339 I need a name. [The Matrix] is it you? *Like the cake in art?*

340

341 We knew we wouldn't get it done and stuff and it was overdue. [George]

342

343 *So, sometimes the perfectionist is good to have in a group because they*
344 *bring up the standard of the work, and they can always be relied upon to*
345 *make sure it's ok.?*

346

347 Some people are perfectionists in just one area [Bob] Like their
348 schoolwork or their extracurricular activities and they don't judge you as
349 a perfectionist.

350

351 *You're absolutely right. Some researchers have found that some people*
352 *are perfectionistic about themselves and others are perfectionistic about*
353 *other people. But also, people can be perfectionistic in one area and not in*
354 *another.*

355

356 *Did anyone do the experiment during the week? what was the half an*
357 *experiment you did [Amber]?*

358

359 I actually did the bad one first. It was in the area of appearance so I
360 didn't wear any make-up, or any jewellery I just plonked on something I
361 hadn't worn in ages..

362

363 *To go to school?*

364

365 To go to youth group. But that was kind of biased because they're really
366 close friends and they wouldn't criticise me anyway. I wore a hat that I'd
367 rediscovered.

368
369 I like that hat!

370
371 I didn't do the exp as much - I went out to mufti-day ,put make-up on,
372 jewellery etc.

373
374 *How was the experience different?*

375
376 Well, the first one I felt really good, and the second one felt good too. I
377 think I need to choose something different.

378
379 *Other than appearance?*

380
381 Shouldn't you go both times to youth group [George]

382
383 *That would be good, [George]. I did ask you to choose a domain, or area*
384 *that wasn't very significant to you. I asked you to take one of the areas*
385 *you gave just one tick to. So, the challenge might be to increase the*
386 *stakes and go for something that is a lot closer to your heart.*

387
388 Maybe I should do it about taking showers, 'cos I take really long showers
389 and it's bad. I use all the hot water.

390
391 ([Snagglepuss] tells about her bad school day)

392
393 *[Storm] did you try anything at all?*

394
395 Yeah, I tried babysitting my little brother. First time I was a good
396 babysitter - I made afternoon tea for him, I made sure he did his
397 homework. Then the next day he came home and I was sitting down
398 watching TV and he asked me something to eat and I said to him to go get
399 it himself. And then he didn't get his HW done that night and I think he
400 got told off by his teacher as well. But I don't think he felt better.

401
402 It's not really up to you if he does his work or not!

403
404 But I should have... it's just that he sits on the playstation playing for
405 hours

406

407 *Interesting to bring up the sense of responsibility that perfectionists can*
408 *have. They can feel responsible not just for themselves but also for their*
409 *families. [Yoda] you were talking about looking after your brothers and*
410 *making sure the household is quiet and well behaved and [Amber] has just*
411 *said 'is it really your responsibility?'*

412

413 I should be saying it to myself!

414

415 *Hearing yourself say it in a group is helpful.*

416

417 Of course, if you're babysitting, you really should be looking after your
418 brother, because it's your job.

419

420 I get paid money for babysitting and if I don't do it properly then I'm not
421 earning my pocket money properly

422

423 *..... perfectionists sometimes take on more responsibility than their job*
424 *entails. I used to be called 'conscientious' at school and that is a word I*
425 *hate now. It was the seeds of my perfectionism. I not only did my own*
426 *work, but if anything was lacking in the group I would take it, finish it off,*
427 *make it pretty, add the headings, borders etc.*

428

429 I've been called conscientious for a really long time.

430

APPENDIX M
PROGRAMME EVALUATION QUESTIONS

HOW USEFUL DID YOU FIND THE FOLLOWING?

Programme assessment form

Improvisation Games



The PLE Model



The Pleasure-Predicting Sheets



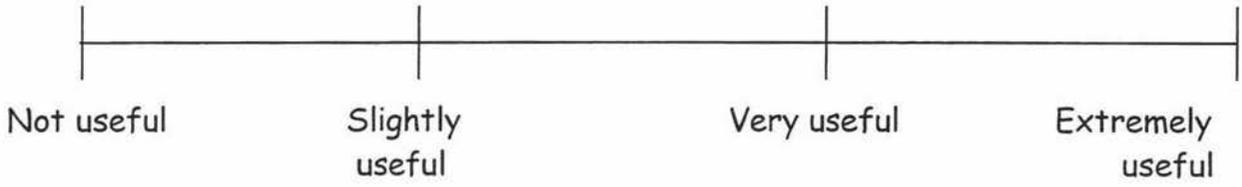
Group Discussions



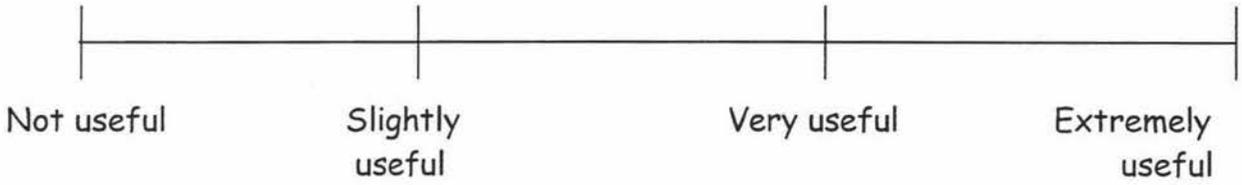
Diaries



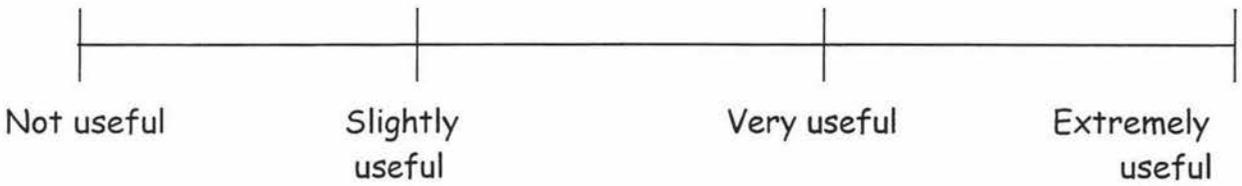
Personal Experiment



Inclusion of non-perfectionists



Making a pros and cons list for perfectionism



Thanks very much. This will help make the programme more valuable to future students.

Questions for follow-up interview with Storm and Amber

- What have you done differently since the programme?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What have you learned about perfectionism?
- What would make this programme more useful to you?
- What would be helpful to you now?
- How would you evaluate the programme using the PLE model?

Score for **P**erformance /100

Score for **L**earning /100

Score for **E**xperience /100

APPENDIX N

ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN *INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION AND TEACHING INTERNATIONAL* (2002) 39 (2) 117 – 123: “RETHINKING GRADES FOR SUSTAINABLE LEARNING”

Rethinking Grades for Sustainable Learning

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SUMMARY

Many students manage their learning processes on the basis of one measure of achievement: the grades they receive on assignments. While these represent current levels of performance, lifelong learning requires that students manage their learning and the quality of their experience as well as performance. This article summarizes the dangers involved in using a singular measure of achievement, and reports on a teaching innovation that encourages students to assess their own learning and experience prior to receiving back graded work. The innovation was successful in allowing students who valued learning to take a holistic view of their achievements.

RETHINKING GRADES FOR SUSTAINABLE LEARNING

Many academics are becoming frustrated by students' reluctance to embrace lifelong learning. The need for on-going learning seems so obvious, and many of us find learning pleasurable and life-affirming. It seems inexcusable that some of our students seek to avoid learning situations or try to escape from their studies as quickly as they can.

Treating a student's avoidance of learning as inexcusable, however, can quickly limit our ability to change the situation. Students may avoid learning in a number of ways: submitting other's work as their own; attending only those classes required in order to pass a course; taking on only those projects they feel have a low risk of failure; or ignoring feedback received on assignments. When we confront behaviour like this, it is easy to assume that the problem lies with the student, thereby failing to explore how we may be contributing to a situation where these behaviours seem like reasonable strategies. Assuming the problem lies with the student in turn encourages the adoption of short-term solutions that leave the fundamental conditions that cause the behaviour unchanged (Senge, 1990).

In this article, we will explore a common practice in educational institutions: the use of singular measures

of student achievement. The authors have come to believe that this practice contributes to situations where students avoid learning, such as those described above. We will explain why we believe this occurs, and describe a teaching innovation designed to alleviate some of the unintended damage we believe is caused by singular measures of achievement.

FLYING ON ONE MEASURE

Imagine you are the pilot of a small aircraft aiming to complete a long journey. Your success depends on more than your ability to fly the plane. Pilots have to learn to aviate (fly the aircraft), navigate (know where they are in relation to where they are going) and communicate (with air traffic control and other pilots). Each of these elements requires skill and attention, and as a pilot you may feel a sense of accomplishment in doing any of them well. However, safe flying requires that you do all three. Giving all your attention to one element only will lead to disaster. Of course, the particular disaster you encounter will depend on what you have been neglecting: failing to aviate leads to an immediate crash, while failure to navigate might get you lost in territory where there is no safe place to land. Completing a successful journey will require you to

balance the needs for aviation, navigation and communication. What is required for a successful journey of life-long learning?

Gallwey (2000) suggests that sustaining any human effort over time requires that we balance the needs of performance, learning and experience. Gallwey refers to these three elements as the 'work triangle' where:

- *Performance* refers to using the capacities one has available to meet the demands of the day;
- *Learning* refers to actions taken to build one's capacities for the future, in recognition that future demands are certain to be different from present demands; and
- *Experience* refers to the quality of life one has while undertaking the activities that make up the endeavour.

Consider how these elements need to be balanced by someone undertaking the work involved in studying at an academic institution. A course of study will involve completing various assignments or tests. Each piece of assessment represents a demand placed upon the student. Grades students receive represent the assessor's judgement of the student's *performance* against this demand. Successful study necessarily involves performing at an acceptable standard.

Students seldom start their academic careers with the knowledge and ability needed to pass all the assessment activities that await them. Consequently, they need to engage in *learning* activities that build capacity – that is, required knowledge and ability – to meet demands. A student who enters a course of study with an initially high level of capacity but gives little attention to learning may find that their performance on assessment activities is acceptable to begin with, then declines over time.

In order to persist at their studies students also need to value the *experience* they are having as they proceed. A student who is performing adequately while learning substantial amounts of useful knowledge may give up because the quality of life is undesirable. The work may be too stressful or too boring; in either case, it will challenge a student's endurance. Many students choose to persist with low quality educational experiences in order to complete a qualification. Nevertheless, where they endure despite the experience they will be reluctant to return to learning once they are finished.

While the need to balance these three elements may appear obvious, the experience of the authors is

that many academics and students reflexively give priority to performance and neglect issues relating to learning and experience. Academics and students are likely to view a student's achievements solely on the basis of grades received. And, when asked to judge the quality of a particular course both academics and students may do so on the basis of the level of demand involved in its assessment, rather than how much students learn or what experience they have while undertaking the course.

A factor that contributes to the emphasis placed on performance is that this is generally the only element measured during a student's academic career. Each time a student is assessed, they receive a grade for their performance but no indication of how much they have learned or what the quality of the experience was like. So, while we might hope that students balance all three elements, there is only a singular measure of achievement available to both academics and students. What are the consequences of this focus on performance?

PROBLEMS WITH SINGULAR GRADES

Reviewing relevant literature and through conversations with students and colleagues, it became apparent to the authors that the 'singular grade' approach has serious negative consequences.

Encouraging unsustainable trade-offs

By having a singular grade, students are encouraged to maximize the one aspect of their work that is measured: performance. While the healthy and sustainable way of improving performance (as indicated by grades) is through learning, this is a strategy that takes time. Students can opt instead for trade-off strategies. One strategy is to trade-off the experience of study; working long hours so study becomes a grind. Another is to cheat – for instance, handing in someone else's work – which increases grades while trading off learning. A singular grade masks these downsides, in that the performance score goes up, but there are no learning or experience scores that come down. Students are not directly confronted with the trade-off they have made. A number of studies indicate increasing levels of trade-offs such as cheating within universities (Walker, 1998).

Encouraging an exotelic approach to life

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) distinguishes between 'autotelic' and 'exotelic' personalities. 'Autotelic' activity refers to that which is done for its own sake, because the individual considers the experience or outcome of doing it valuable. 'Exotelic' activity is that which is motivated by an outside goal or reward system. Csikszentmihalyi's research suggests that young people with autotelic personalities are more likely to have a higher quality of experience than their peers. Grades given for student work generally reflect performance measured against the standards of an external source, the examiner. Experience and learning, on the other hand are best judged by having the individual students assess themselves. Singular grades thus make assessment activities primarily exotelic.

Unproductive competition

The exotelic personality is highly visible in competitive situations. Many students learn to judge themselves, not against any internal standards, but based on where they finish in comparison to others. While competition can operate in a healthy way, spurring people to set goals that are personally important, it can also be practised destructively. This occurs where students seek to 'win' by interfering with the learning of others (for example, hiding library books needed for an assignment). A singular goal allows students to adopt either healthy or unhealthy strategies.

Singular goals

A student who has a singular measure of their work is constrained in setting goals. When students set goals for work on an assignment or a course they are most likely to make it a performance goal such as 'I want to achieve a B+'. Many students internalize their performance history to the point where they say, 'I am a B+ student'. Here past performance is shaping the student's identity and the goals she is likely to set for the future. Providing a mechanism for measuring learning and experience could enable students to articulate goals that they otherwise could not. For instance, a student might make it a goal to 'Increase the quality of my experience to a B+ level, while not allowing performance to drop below B-'.

Increased fear of failure

A key factor in the unhealthy operation of perfectionist attitudes is the fear of failure. Perfectionist students are

likely to set unrealistic goals for their performance, and be dissatisfied even with outstanding achievements (Hamachek, 1978). Using singular goals directed toward performance encourages students to treat failure only as negative, and to actively avoid it where they can.

Reduced acceptance of diversity in the classroom

While students might appreciate the learning opportunities created by diversity in the classroom, often they will prefer to work alone in order to ensure that the singular performance measure reflects their own contribution. Working with others may improve the quality of their learning or of the experience they have, but because it puts their performance at risk they may tend to reject it as an option.

Distorting student choice

Fritz (1991) describes the process by which people find themselves working in jobs they hate. Early success (according to singular measures of performance) encourages students to continue with certain subjects and drop others. These decisions tend to reflect performance rather than the student's level of engagement with the subject. Fritz encourages a change of view that many students struggle to make: that if something is worth doing, it is worth doing badly, until you can do it well. Persistence at a task that one is performing poorly is endangered if all feedback involves singular measures of performance.

TOWARD BALANCE

How can students be encouraged to take a balanced approach to the academic process? Directly educating students about the need for balance is likely to have limited effect. Exhortations to students to be honest or to treat mistakes as valuable learning experiences sound vacuous and prissy to students who for years have been taught that education is part of the 'tooth and claw' fight for good jobs, where only the strong (the high performers) survive. In the world view of most students, prospective employers do not care if studying was a good experience – they too are interested in the singular measure of achievement, performance.

The authors decided that the key to changing students' behaviour was enabling them to become aware of their achievements on all three dimensions: performance, learning and experience. Gallwey (2000) suggests that we can bring about change and show respect for the

120 IETI 39,2

dignity of the person undergoing change, by trusting that people are natural learners. As natural learners, people unconsciously seek to close gaps between where they are and where they want to be, so long as they are aware of the gap. We sought to empower learners by making them more aware of their achievements in the areas of learning and experience. To do this, we had students undertake an exercise prior to receiving back assignments that had been graded. Given that the grade awarded by the marker would represent the student's performance on the assigned work, we designed the exercise to allow them to establish a measure of the learning and experience associated with the work.

Earlier in the course, the class had discussed the need to balance performance, learning and experience at work. The exercise began with a brief explanation of why this was also important in regard to their work on academic assignments. Then students were asked to draw three continuums on a sheet of paper, each with 0 at one end and 100 at the other. One continuum was labelled 'Learning', the second 'Experience' and the third 'Performance'. The class was told that when they received their assignment back they would be able to place the mark (awarded out of 100) on the Performance continuum. This exercise was to enable them to give themselves marks for learning and experience.

Students were then asked to reflect on the following learning-related questions: what did you learn? How big a jump in skill, knowledge or understanding did you make when carrying out the assignment – no progress, a small step, a jump or a quantum leap? How much do you value what you learned? Because some people like to reflect in conversation, opportunity was provided to discuss these questions with others in the class. Each student was then asked to give themselves a mark out of 100 to represent the amount of learning involved in the assignment, and to place this on the 'Learning' continuum. They were told that there could

be further learning for them when the assignments were returned – more might be gained from the marker's feedback – so this mark could go up. However, it could not go down, because the feedback would not diminish what they had learned.

Students were then encouraged to discuss their experience in completing the assignment. To help their reflection they were encouraged to think of three words that best represented the nature of the experience. After their discussions, they were asked to place a mark on the 'Experience' continuum, representing the quality of their experience in relation to the assignment. This mark was not one that would be changed by the feedback.

The process was complete when, at the next class, the students received their marked assignments and were able to plot their score on the 'Performance' continuum. Because students were so accustomed to judging achievement against the singular measure, the authors decided it was important to have a time gap between assessing their own learning and experience and receiving the marker's assessment of performance. It was feared that without the gap, students might discount their own learning or the quality of their experience if they were dissatisfied with the grade given to their performance.

To gauge the impact of this process, the authors used this intervention with the second assignment for the course and surveyed students twice: once after receiving back their first assignment (with no intervention), and again after the second assignment (with the intervention described above). In each survey, students were asked to indicate their level of agreement (from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree') with a series of statements relating to assignments. Table 1 shows the percentage of students either agreeing or strongly agreeing with several of the statements in the surveys. Students were not forced to choose between values of performance, learning and experience: it was

Table 1 Student responses to survey

Question	Agree: Survey 1 (%)	Agree: Survey 2 (%)
I judge my achievements on the basis of the grade I receive [<i>Performance</i>]	89.5	84.2
I judge my achievements on the basis of how much I learn [<i>Learning</i>]	60.5	68.4
I judge my achievements . . . [<i>Experience</i>]	50.0	47.4
I felt anxious prior to receiving back my assignment.	83.7	52.7

Rethinking Grades for Sustainable Learning 121

possible for them to answer 'strongly agree' to all the statements presented.

While fewer students in the second survey strongly agreed or agreed with the statement relating to performance, and more strongly agreed or agreed with those relating to learning and experience, with only 19 students completing both surveys these results were not significant. The only significant change was that students indicated a decrease in anxiety in connection with the second assignment. Of course, the reduced anxiety could be explained by other factors, such as a better understanding of the course requirements.

When asked in the second survey whether they intended to continue to use the process or some variation on it when receiving other assignments, 42.1% responded 'Yes', 52.6% responded 'No' and 5.3% responded 'Maybe'. When asked to give their reasons for answering as they did, there was a qualitative difference between the responses of those answering 'yes' and those answering 'no'.

The eight comments made by students indicating they would continue to use the technique were all relatively long, with an average of 30.25 words, and generally indicated an appreciation of the need for balance. Comments included the following:

It provides a very holistic view to study and life in general.

I think it quite aptly labels what I have been struggling to define regarding my feeling of dissatisfaction with some papers - even though I may get an A+ grade. Conclusion? I obviously highly rate learning.

Those not intending to use the technique in the future gave shorter comments, averaging just 12.5 words. These generally indicated that the student did not value learning or experience sufficiently to make the process worth the effort required. The 10 comments made included the following:

Too emotional to think about.

I am not geared at accepting failure. I think I will always rate myself based on the grade that I get.

It only told me what I already knew. Besides, I like to do assignments and once the results are back, I like to move on and forget about it.

The small sample of students involved in the study necessitates caution in drawing conclusions. Still, the

comments suggested to the authors that students who already took a balanced approach to their study were more likely to appreciate the process, because it enabled them to assess their achievement more clearly than was possible with a singular measure. On the other hand, students who did not place value on learning and experience were less likely to see the process as worthwhile.

FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

The results suggested that the process made little difference to students with the greatest need: those who place relatively little value on learning or the quality of their experience while studying. While we may have hoped for more, the limited impact is not a surprise.

The process was introduced because of the authors' belief that the existing academic culture, in their own institution at least, over-emphasizes performance at the expense of learning and experience; and that balance in these areas is important both for individual learners and the institution as a whole. As discussed at the outset, we believe that issues such as student cheating are symptomatic of a culture in need of change. Understanding the nature of culture alerts us to the need for patience and endurance when seeking to bring about change.

Cultures form when groups establish a preference for one value (for example, performance) over its opposite (learning). Eventually this preference slips beneath the group's level of consciousness (Hampden-Turner, 1990). As with anything we repeat often enough, choosing a performance-oriented approach can become something we do without thinking: an assumption regarding the best way to act. Culture thus represents the pattern of unconsciously held values shaping decision-making within a particular community. When the community designs a process, the process will both reflect existing values and etch them more deeply into the collective way of thinking.

Most students have little reason to question existing processes associated with assessment. Gauging achievement on the basis of singular performance-oriented grades appears entirely unremarkable because it is so much a part of the academic landscape. So, while existing assessment processes might create frustrations for both students and academics the pervasive nature of assessment is likely to result in people blaming one another for their frustrations.

We can expect that many students, guided by unconsciously held assumptions about the primacy of performance, will see little value in a process that encourages balance. What, then, is the point of introducing the process?

The results made it apparent that some students did appreciate the process and intended to use it. For these students, the process represents a way of expressing their goals and achievements in ways that they struggled to in the past. Further, we believe that processes such as this can act as a lever for bringing about changes to the assumptions held by students.

Cultural experts Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) draw on the work of cognitive consistency theorists such as Festinger (1957) in explaining how we deal with conflicts between values. As we have seen, performance and learning have the potential to be regularly in conflict. A student might need to choose between taking a course where they will get good marks and one that promises great opportunity for learning along with the risk of failure. Singular measures of achievement allow students to gain cognitive consistency by repressing one of the values involved, learning. In opting to do the easy course, the student begins to form the opinion that 'I only really care about the grade anyway'. A process that increases the visibility of all the values involved makes such repression more difficult. With the values of learning and experience repressed, cognitive consistency simply requires action in harmony with the belief, 'It is important to get good grades'. When all values are visible, students have the challenge of harmonizing their actions with the belief, 'It is important to get good grades and enjoy my learning by engaging in high quality learning'. Our hope is that regular use of the process will encourage students to seek cognitive consistency by aiming to maximize all the values involved.

Seen in this light, the results indicate to the authors the need to act in two areas. Firstly, there is a need to persist with techniques that make students aware of their current achievements across the range of values necessary for life-long learning. This on its own is unlikely to impact on all students. Consequently, changed assessment processes need to be used in conjunction with education about the need for balance.

By addressing both grading processes and education about the values involved in education, we hope to empower students to successfully manage their own journeys of lifelong learning.

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Rethinking Grades for Sustainable Learning 123

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APPENDIX O

ARTICLE DUE FOR PUBLICATION IN *JOURNAL FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED* 26(2): "REFRAMING THE PERFECTIONIST'S 'CATCH 22' DILEMMA: A SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH"

Reframing the Perfectionist's "Catch 22" Dilemma: A Systems Thinking Approach

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Abstract

Perfectionist tendencies present a particular challenge to gifted and talented children. The complexity of perfectionism, however, acts as an impediment to agreement on the nature of the phenomenon and on development of strategies to ameliorate its effects. This article uses systems thinking to examine the dynamic complexity of perfectionism. These dynamics are explained as an attempt by the perfectionist to achieve cognitive consistency. The unrealistic World View of a perfectionist generates a "Catch 22" that makes change difficult. Rather than change their World View perfectionists are more likely to attempt to change their behaviour or their levels of self esteem. Fundamental change requires a World View that balances performance and learning, and this involves changing views on performance and failure. The article discusses how such fundamental change might be effectively achieved.

Reframing the Perfectionist's "Catch - 22" Dilemma: a Systems Thinking

Approach

Perfectionism represents a significant challenge both to educators desiring to help learners strive for excellence and to researchers seeking to build an understanding of the phenomenon. It is imperative that we achieve a greater understanding of perfectionism given the dysfunctional behaviour with which it is associated (Burns, 1980; Greenspon, 2000). Perfectionism has been linked to underachievement in education (Davis & Rim, 1994), depression (Blatt, 1995), eating disorders (Halmi, Sunday, Strober, Kaplan, Woodside, Fichter, Treasure, Berrettini, & Kaye, 2000) and suicide (Delisle, 1990), and its effects are often associated with extremely able students (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). While it has been suggested that perfectionism can be 'normal' (Hamachek, 1978) and 'positive' (Frost, Heimberg, Holt, Mattia, & Newbauer, 1993) we are concerned with the way perfectionism undermines life-long learning and with interventions that minimize its harmful effects.

There is little question that something needs to be done, yet knowing what to do is hampered by the complexity of the phenomenon. Educational literature contains a range of definitions of perfectionism along with a variety of alternative strategies for ameliorating its effects. A significant challenge for anyone wanting to take thoughtful action is to develop a model of perfectionism that integrates existing knowledge into a complete picture. The aim of this article is to generate such a model based on application of Systems Thinking, a tool for understanding complexity (Senge, 1990).

Systems Thinking

Systems Thinking arose during the 20th century as scientists became aware of the limitations of analysis as an approach to inquiry (Ackoff, 1997). Since the Renaissance, analysis has been the preferred approach to scientific thinking in Western nations. The word *analysis* stems from a Greek word meaning 'loosen' or 'undo' and means to break something up into its component parts.

The opposite of analysis is synthesis, the bringing together of parts together into a whole. Clearly, analysis and synthesis ought to be complementary; where something has been broken into parts, those parts need to be brought back together again. However, over time any community forms a culture: a pattern of unconsciously held preferences for one way of thinking over another. Deconstructing those things we wish to understand has become part of the culture of Western nations, in particular of English-speaking democracies such as Britain, the USA and New Zealand (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1993).

The effect of this culture is that synthesis is often neglected. Having broken something up into component parts the Western scientist who seeks further understanding then breaks the parts up into their components. Analysis produces long lists of elements, all of which need to be considered in establishing what needs to be done in a particular situation. This is what Senge (1990) describes as 'detail complexity': the more we understand the more elements we see, with each element separate from those around it.

Systems Thinking aims to inquire into the system as a whole. It helps synthesis by focusing, not on the elements of something, but on the relationships or interactions between the elements, and between the thing and its environment. Where analysis concentrates on *how* a thing works, synthesis and Systems Thinking seek to reveal *why* it works as it does. This involves shifting from a concern for detail complexity to a concern for 'dynamic complexity': concern for dynamic relationships rather than fine distinctions.

Another fundamental difference between Systems Thinking and analysis is that causality is viewed as circular rather than linear. In analysis we often find ourselves in arguments over whether A causes B or B causes A. For instance, one researcher may investigate the extent to which teacher behaviour influences students, where another investigates how student behaviour influences teachers. Systems Thinking seeks to acknowledge both influences: student influences teacher who influences

student who influences teacher. Causal Loop Diagrams (CLDs) are used to graphically chart the relationships in a way that allows complex dynamics to be expressed with greater clarity. A CLD for the relationship between teacher and student described above is shown in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1: A Reinforcing Loop

The arrows in the CLD indicate the direction of causality. A change in the Teacher's Estimation of Student Potential will cause a change in Teacher Actions to Encourage Students. The 'R' in the centre of the loop indicates that the loop is reinforcing; the interaction between the variables in this loop generates change that reinforces itself. So, if one variable starts to grow, it leads to growth of the other variables, which generates growth of the variable we started with, and so on. Some loops we will encounter are balancing; that is, one variable causes another to grow that causes the original to decline, bringing the system into balance. In our CLDs we will indicate where loops are balancing with a 'B.'

Notice that the variables used in the CLD are broad statements such as 'Teacher Action to Encourage Students.' Analytical thinking might encourage 'inward' exploration to find, for instance, the kinds of actions that might be involved, generating a detailed list of the different strategies teachers use and the effectiveness of each strategy. Systems Thinking is more likely to keep variables broad and inquire 'outward' to find other variables in the environment surrounding teacher and student which influence a teacher's actions.

Inward inquiry provides finer and finer distinctions about the subject of interest, enabling clearer description of its nature. Outward inquiry provides context and meaning for the subject, explaining how it develops and is maintained and where intervention will have greatest impact. These are two different views, each with a

contribution to make toward a complete understanding of the subject. Until now, research into perfectionism has concentrated on descriptive 'inward' studies with little emphasis on intervention (Shafran, Cooper & Fairburn, 2002).

Gould, Voyer & Ford (1998) provide an example of how this outward exploration can aid in developing effective interventions. They used Systems Thinking to deepen understanding of anxiety in the workplace. Their approach enabled them to successfully reshape the system that was generating and perpetuating anxiety. Previous attempts to control anxiety had unintentionally aggravated the condition. The systemic, outward view enabled them to find effective, enduring interventions.

Consider what we can learn if we take a Systems Thinking view of perfectionism.

Problems with Definitions

Considerable discussion has taken place in academic literature on how perfectionism is best defined. Some researchers make the distinction between healthy and unhealthy perfectionism (Parker, 1997), where others, notably Greenspon (2000), consider all perfectionism to be unhealthy. According to Greenspon, what some call 'healthy perfectionism' is really the desirable pursuit of excellence, something quite different from perfectionism. Why does this disagreement exist when both are seeking to describe the same process?

One cause of the disagreement lies in their preferences regarding inward and outward modes of inquiry. Both Greenspon (2000) and Parker (1997) agree on the destructive potential of perfectionism. They see perfectionism as characterised by unrealistic efforts to achieve high standards, along with an unremitting search for acceptance through perfect performance. And they agree that perfectionism is linked with outcomes such as underachievement, low self-esteem, avoidance of risk, and burnout. Confusion arises because there is a great deal of commonality in behaviour between people who are bound up in destructive processes and ones who pursue high standards in a sustainable way. Greenspon has responded to the confusion by

inquiring outwards, asking 'What else, in combination with behaviour, makes up the system that generates these destructive outcomes?' He sees behaviour as important, yet not sufficient to explain what is happening.

Greenspon's outward-inquiry approach reflects the philosophical base of Systems Thinking, and he states that in psychological terms, perfectionism refers to "the organising principle that unless one is perfect, one is worthless as a person" (1999). We will adopt the extended definition of perfectionism given by Burns (1980), one that is consistent with Greenspon's view:

"... perfectionists... are those whose standards are high beyond reach or reason, people who strain compulsively and unremittingly toward impossible goals and who measure their own worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishment. For these people, the drive to excel can only be self-defeating." (p. 34).

Burns' definition identifies behaviour as an important element of perfectionism when he refers to compulsive 'straining.' He also encompasses attitudes when referring to unreachable standards, and self-assessment when referring to measuring one's worth. To understand the dynamics affecting perfectionistic students, therefore, we consider their behaviour, their attitudes and assessments they make of themselves. Work by cognitive psychologists such as Festinger (1957) has established that people seek consistency in their lives. Thus, as shown in Figure 2, perfectionistic students, along with the rest of us, work to achieve consistency between the attitudes making up their World View, observations they make of their own behaviour and their Self-Assessments.

Insert Figure 2: Perfectionist Variables

A number of crucial attitudes contribute to the World View of perfectionists. These include:

- It is important to be a worthwhile person
- To be worthwhile a person must do everything perfectly
- Worthwhile people do not lower their standards.

These attitudes create the context for dynamics that have been described in educational literature on perfectionism. Imagine that a young student holds a World View as outlined above. During the early years of schooling the student might be told that her performance on assigned work is perfect. The student can hold such a World View—indeed, it can become stronger—while maintaining high levels of self-esteem, because her observations of her own behaviour are that she achieves excellence in everything that is asked of her.

Insert Figure 3: The Structure of Perfectionism

As time goes by, however, cognitive challenge of the work intensifies and she is exposed to competition with other high achievers. Instead of getting 100% on tests she gets 90%. She observes that her performance is less than perfect. The result is a degree of inconsistency. She holds as a World View the attitudes listed above, her self-assessment is that she is a worthwhile person, yet her behaviour as measured by the test is less than perfect. The in-built desire for consistency demands that one or more of these factors must change. Figure 3 shows the possibilities.

The loops B1, B2 and B3 represent the different options the student has for dealing with the inconsistency she is experiencing. Each of these is a balancing loop; that is, they are designed to bring feelings of inconsistency back into balance, not allow them to grow. Her first option is likely to be B1, endeavouring to change her behaviour, so that there are fewer examples of imperfect performance to observe and

thus reduced inconsistency. For our student, 'action to change behaviour' might mean working harder at the subject to raise her test mark to 100%. In doing that, she acts in the same way as a classmate with a different World View who enjoys striving for high standards, but who does not believe her self worth is determined by success on tests. In other words, our perfectionist student's behaviour may falsely appear to be a healthy concern for excellence. However, 'action to change behaviour' might include dropping subjects where she suspects she will not perform perfectly or withdrawing from activities that involve risk of failure (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999).

While activation of loop B1 may provide some temporary respite from the discomfort of inconsistency there is little hope of permanent relief. Our perfectionist student is not in actuality perfect, so will continue to be confronted with observations of her own imperfect behaviour.

Loop B2 provides an alternative path toward consistency. Here, the student changes her self-assessment, deciding perhaps that she is not perfect and therefore she is not a worthwhile person. B2, however, does not offer a permanent solution. Her World View includes the attitude that it is important to be worthwhile. So, she is likely to consider her non-worthwhile state a dreadful secret that needs to be kept from parents and teachers who consider her to be, not only worthwhile, but an excellent student (Reis, 1987). Her self-assessment is that she is not worthwhile but she really wants to be, so she heads back into attempts to change behaviour. Perfectionist students thus oscillate between determined action to be perfect and misery based on deeply negative self-assessments.

The actions the perfectionist takes to make her behaviour consistent with her World View and her self-assessment may become more and more dramatic. It could involve focusing her attention on an area where she can control her behaviour, such as her eating. In some extreme cases, in an effort to bring her behaviour into line with her self-assessment that she is not worthwhile and her belief that it is important

to be worthwhile, perfectionists have ended their lives. Is there any way out of this destructive process?

Changing World Views

Fundamental resolution to the inconsistency lies in change to the student's World View (loop B3). And yet, rather than changing the perfectionist attitudes that are at the root of her discomfort, our student continues to oscillate between B1 and B2. What prevents her from working through the process shown in B3?

As shown in loop R1, a perfectionist's World View will also influence her willingness to change her attitudes. In particular, if she believes that worthwhile people do not lower their standards she will resist efforts to convince her that perfect performance is not necessary, that she should "ease up on herself." Perfectionist beliefs thus become a self-perpetuating trap, preventing learners from taking the one action that will bring about fundamental relief from the inconsistencies in their lives. How can people working with perfectionists help them to break free from this trap?

Analytical thinking, with its linear approach to causality, might encourage teachers and parents to work on the self-assessment of a student. Because many of the destructive behaviours involved in perfectionism stem from a student's feeling that she is not worthwhile, it appears appropriate to build up her self-esteem by convincing her that she is worthwhile. The circular causality of the CLD in Figure 3 suggests that this approach is unlikely to bring about a long-term solution. If action was taken to make the 'Level of Self Esteem' more positive, what would result? The CLD harmonizes with Burns' (1980) observations that perfectionists are not helped by encouragement to "ease off" or "lighten up on themselves." According to the CLD doing so would *increase* the Degree of Inconsistency, compelling the student to activate either B1 or B2 once more.

Systems Thinking refers to such action as 'low leverage' because there is little long term result from the effort expended. Effort to increase a student's self esteem might

have an immediate impact, but problems soon return requiring even more effort. Where can we act with greater leverage?

The CLD indicates that fundamental change requires action to change the student's World View, but that this is prevented from happening by loop R1. Leverage lies, therefore in finding a way past the blocking effect of R1 and the unwillingness to lower standards. Consider how this might be done.

Performance, Learning and Experience

The student is trapped because she is unwilling to lower her standards. Her World View does not allow her to take this action. If, however, a change can be framed as a *raising* of standards the perfectionist is likely to be more willing—indeed, may feel compelled—to make it. A new World View can be framed as raising standards by showing a student that her existing beliefs are incomplete.

This reframing is relatively straight forward because a World View that puts such a high value on performance is incomplete according to research into sustainable work. According to Gallwey (2000) sustainable work requires a balance of performance, learning and experience. Performance involves using whatever capacity one has to meet the demands of the situation. Learning, on the other hand, is about growing one's capacity in preparation for future, more challenging, demands. Experience refers to the quality of the experience people have while they are engaged in the work. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990) optimal experiences occur when demands and capacity are balanced, requiring that people are able to give attention to both performance and learning.

Perfectionism does not seek this balance. Rather, a perfectionist student will consistently give priority to performing rather than to learning. This is because learning is closely associated with failure (Fritz, 1991), and from a perfectionist's World View failure is an indication that a person is imperfect and therefore not

worthwhile. Indeed, fear of failure is consistently identified as a defining characteristic of perfectionism (Greenspon, 2000).

Perfectionists often adopt strategies that enable them to perform without learning. For instance, they may only take subjects in which they have proved themselves capable. They will avoid projects that require them to learn new skills. They will avoid working with other people even though this might provide a rich learning environment. When working in groups they do not feel they are in control of the performance of the group as a whole, and often feel compelled to do all the work of the group to ensure it meets their standards. With each of these strategies, perfectionists trade-off opportunities for learning in order to maximise their performance.

Similarly, perfectionists are prepared to drive themselves through stressful conditions in order to maximise performance. They may go without sleep and deny themselves leisure periods. They may try to motivate themselves by refusing to get satisfaction from work that contains any flaws. These strategies trade-off the quality of their work experience in order to maximise performance.

So, there is a body of literature supporting a belief that error-free or perfect performance is not sufficient for sustainable work. This literature is supported by evidence in the lives of perfectionists themselves who can see that the behaviours they feel compelled to engage in are not sustainable, but rather lead to burnout. The literature and the perfectionist's own experiences provide a basis for saying that *truly* worthwhile people may not only perform outstandingly, but also ensure that they are learning and having a high quality experience.

In work we have done with individual students who manifest perfectionist beliefs, they have been helped to make considerable progress on the basis of the Systems Thinking view discussed here (Ramsey, Franklin, Ramsey, Wells, 2002). In particular, we have encouraged students to view grades as a measure of one aspect

of their work: their performance in relation to the demands we as teachers have made. Because students are in the best—and possibly only—position to measure how much they are learning and the quality of their experience, we ask them to give themselves grades in each of these areas for assigned work they complete.

In cases where perfectionist students give themselves grades for learning and experience, to go with the performance grades we have given, they initially report they are scoring highly on performance and poorly in the other two areas. They also report that they feel free to set themselves goals different from any they had set before. For example, they were able to aim to improve the grades they were giving themselves for experience, while maintaining B grades for performance. Previously they had only set themselves goals for improved performance.

Further Research

Perfectionism is a relentless and unsustainable quest for acceptance that often affects students who are gifted and used to performing to the highest standards (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). Further inquiry into how perfectionist students can be helped is vital, and Systems Thinking gives some significant indications as to where we can most effectively target our efforts.

Further work is needed to develop holistic grading procedures that address all three areas of performance, learning and experience. While individual cases show that this method has potential to help perfectionist students out of the trap created by their World View, experience suggests that the technique is difficult to institutionalise in educational settings where learners are consistently told that performance is all that really matters, and where rewards are allocated based solely on performance.

Work with perfectionists needs to go beyond helping them to see the need for balancing performance, learning and experience. While a student may intellectually

grasp the need for learning, more work will be needed to help them become desensitised to failure.

Improvisational drama is an area in which the authors are undertaking research. This work in progress holds promise for helping with the process of desensitisation. Improvisational drama disrupts a student's normal reaction to failure in a number of ways. It usually takes place within an environment that expects and even celebrates failure. To be successful, improvisation cannot be scripted or prepared in advance (Newton, 1999). For this reason, participants are encouraged to treat failure as a normal part of the process. Delivering scripted responses—ones that have been thought out in advance—is treated as one of the few things a student can do that is wrong.

“My Word, Your Word” is an example of an improvisational game where players must respond to the events of the moment. In pairs, they alternate turns to create a story, one word at a time. Trying to force the outcome cannot work because each player has no control over the participation of the other. The story is lost if players stop concentrating on what is being said in the present moment. Scripted story-lines become impossible. Perfectionistic attempts to control outcomes immediately backfire so success comes from flexibility and real-time responsiveness.

Participants can be told that failure is a sign that they are approaching the work correctly. In this way improvisational drama, unlike most activities a perfectionist might engage in, *requires* the student to experience failure in order to achieve successful outcomes.

Improvisational drama may appear to be full of risk for some perfectionist students, who may be tempted to withdraw from the activities. Therefore research is required to establish procedures that invite participation and introduce students to the area in measured amounts that limit the amount of risk they must tolerate.

Systems Thinking is a discipline that encourages researchers to be expansive in their thinking. Such an approach is evidently needed in addressing the complex challenges of perfectionism. As we have seen, the view of perfectionism presented in the article focuses attention on the fundamental inconsistencies inherent in the World View of perfectionists. Educators are encouraged to explore strategies that help perfectionists break out of the Catch 22 dilemma this world view creates.

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Figure 1: A Reinforcing Loop

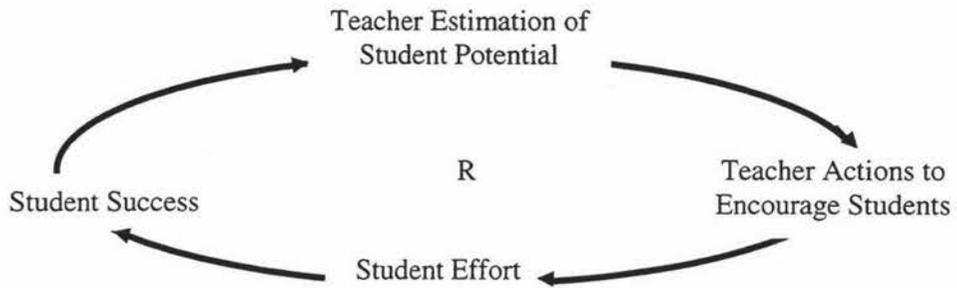


Figure 2: Perfectionist Variables

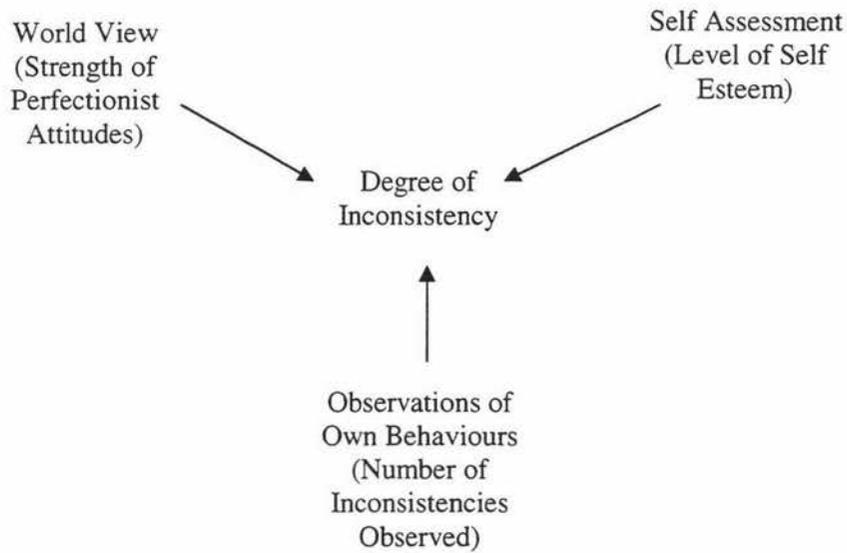


Figure 3: The Structure of Perfectionism

