

## **Application – Myrne B. Nevison Professorship in Counselling Psychology**

### **Vision Statement**

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My vision for the Myrne B. Nevison Professorship in Counselling Psychology is to undertake a program of research that investigates the efficacy of interventions addressing a variety of challenges affecting youth, such as unemployment and precarious employment, addiction, eating disorders, immigration, and so forth. The proposed interventions will be based on a body of research generated by my colleagues and me over the past 20 years focusing on the joint and goal-directed nature of youth activities and development. This body of research reflects a conceptual approach, that is, contextual action theory, and an accompanying research method, that is, the action-project method, initiated and refined by my colleagues and me. Specifically, we propose to use this framework, method, and body of research to develop both preventive and remedial interventions that target marginalized and at-risk youth and others critical to the development of these youth and to examine the impact of the interventions. In previous research we have been able to identify and monitor the projects that young people engage in with significant others. The extension we propose for the Professorship is to focus on the joint goal-directed projects between the youth and significant others as the basis effective interventions.

This statement provides an overview of the approach I envision for the Professorship and addresses the means that will be used to implement it, and how it will be assessed.

### **I. Overview**

My colleagues and I have had several research grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council directed toward the development and use of contextual action theory as both a theoretical framework and research method. These studies address the joint actions and projects between relevant parties on a range of topics, including parent-adolescent conversations about the adolescent's future (Young, et al., 1997; Young, Valach, Ball, et al., 2001), these conversations in Chinese-Canadian families (Young, et al., 2003), in families with and without challenges (Young, Marshall, et al., 2006), in urban residing Aboriginal families in Canada (Marshall et al., 2011), parent-adolescent conversations about health (Young, Lynam, et al., 2001), about sun protection (Young, Logan, et al., 2005), friendship projects between parents and adolescents (Marshall et al., 2008), parent-young adult projects in the transition-to-adulthood (Young et al., 2008), and counselling projects in the transition to adulthood (Young, et al., 2011), unconscious processes in career counselling (Dyer et al., 2010), parent-adolescent leisure time projects during the transition to high school (Marshall, Young et al., 2014), peer conversations between emerging adults (Young et al., in press), and for young people with intellectual disabilities, parent-young adult transition-to-adulthood projects (Young, et al., in progress).

In addition, several doctoral students have used the conceptualization and method for topics such as parent-child adjustment to cochlear implantation (Zaidman-Zait & Young, 2008), recovery from addiction (Graham et al., 2008), parental grieving over the death of a child (Klaassen, et al., 2015), romantic partners' career planning (Domene et al., 2011), learning mindfulness (Dyer, 2011), and the construction of body image between mother and the adolescent daughters (Polak, 2014), recovery from adolescent depression as a joint parent-adolescent project (Wilson, 2015), and weight restoration in adolescent anorexia as a parent project (Socholutiuk, in preparation).

To date, this research program has focused largely on describing the joint projects between adolescents/young adults and significant others. Many of these descriptive studies have focused on marginalized and at-risk youth, for example, Aboriginal youth living in cities, adolescents living in families with economic challenges, adolescent depression and anorexia, young persons with intellectual disabilities, transition to high school and to

adulthood generally. However, in virtually all of them, many participants have remarked that participation has been meaningful and made important differences in their lives. Specifically, we hypothesize that the method we have used in this research, that is, the action project method, works as an intervention particularly when the people or the actions are otherwise being silenced or stigmatized, as is often the case with marginalized and at-risk youth. For example, it is possible that helping adolescents suffering from depression or youth who cannot find employment identify, describe, and monitor their on-going actions and projects as they engage in them in their lives generates positive outcomes, as has been labeled by some of our participants themselves.

The Myrne B. Nevison Professorship will provide a specific opportunity to establish a stronger link between a proven research method, conceptual framework, and body of research with evidence-based practice in the form of interventions for marginalized and at-risk youth. The Professorship will allow my co-researchers, graduate students and me to address not only potential interventions, but also, because of the focus on intervention, with the other two criteria of evidence-based practice, that is, client characteristics and their economic, cultural, and familial contexts. Importantly, the Professorship will provide the basis for moving forward with the identification and potential empirical validation of methods for intervening with youth regarding a range of important issues and challenges.

The conceptual framework of goal-directed action can be applied to many different counselling approaches. In addition, we have made specific recommendations regarding possible effective interventions (Young, Valach, & Domene, 2015) based on our research. Interventions to be developed in this research will be based on the following: using narrative, identifying current individual and joint goals and how they are implemented, using video playback to increase awareness of clients' cognitive and emotional processes that guide action, and helping clients self-monitor by repeated engagement by telephone, texting or other means. Also involved in this process are: (a) creating and maintaining an effective working alliance, (b) identifying the actions that are salient in the client's life, (c) addressing problematic action projects and careers, (d) addressing emotion and emotional memory, (e) connecting what occurs in counselling with the client's daily life (Young et al., 2011). We have also had the opportunity to discuss possible interventions with practitioners in a workshop supported by the Faculty of Education in 2014.

## **II. Implementation**

Two foci will guide the work during the Professorship. First, I will actively engage in the development and implementation of interventions that can be applied to a wide range of challenges facing at-risk and marginalized youth. The particular groups and associated interventions will depend to some extent on the interests of colleagues and graduate students and current and anticipated funding. For example, with colleagues in the School of Social Work, we hope to continue with research on interventions to facilitate the transition to adulthood for youth with intellectual disabilities; with graduate students, we hope to initiate research for young people aspiring to be elite athletes (a group for whom the at-risk factors relate to the ongoing changes and implementation of youth sport programming), and examine sexual identity development among gay adolescents as a function parent-adolescent joint projects.

Secondly, two specific research projects that address interventions based on the model we described are envisioned. With colleagues at two other Canadian universities, we plan apply for funding research funding to develop and implement an intervention that addresses the challenges of international students in Canada. With colleagues in Portugal and Brazil as well as here at UBC, we intend to apply to the Jacobs Foundation's Marbach Residence Program in order to develop an international research study that addresses youth unemployment and precarious employment. We have already received encouragement from the Jacobs Foundation regarding our proposal to the Marbach Residence Program. In the first year of the Professorship we will develop and pilot test the intervention for this group.

### **III. Assessment**

Past accomplishment is a strong predictor of future performance. My colleague, Sheila Marshall of the School of Social Work, and I have a good track record in establishing the basis for the sustainable impact of the approach presented in this application. We have had eight major research grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada using this approach to investigate issues pertinent to children and youth, in addition to six smaller national and local grants. International applications of the approach have been made in Finland and Saudi Arabia.

Our funded projects have resulted in significant publications including journal articles, book chapters, and books on the use of the theory in counseling practice. We have received awards for our work on contextual action theory and the method (e.g., best article awards from the *Career Development Quarterly*, 2007 and 2011). We expect that an important assessment of the success of Professorship will be in following: (1) research proposals submitted, (2) research proposals funded, (3) papers in well established journals, (4) descriptions of the interventions for practitioners through book chapters and workshops, and (5) conference presentations, and (6) successful international collaborations.

Specific research studies will employ appropriate process and outcome assessment means to meet the expectations of evidence based practice.

### **IV. Conclusion**

The Professorship represents the important next step in a substantial research trajectory and body of knowledge. This body of knowledge is the basis for its application in interventions with youth in domains that have proven to be challenging for some young people.