CHAPTER I

Introduction

Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can.

— Emerson.

A democratic society has an obligation to provide opportunities for individuals to develop and use their talents. Nunn (1920) observed that

.... the primary aim of all educational effort should be to help boys and girls to achieve the highest degree of individual development which they are capable of.

The student of outstanding capacity who fails to achieve scholastically at a level reasonably commensurate with his ability poses a challenge to teachers as well as parents. Although teachers have long been aware of discrepancies between certain students' ability and their performance, the term 'underachiever' has come into wide use only recently. It was not until the publication of Paul Wolfe's (1954) Manpower Studies, that the educators and the public became aware that underachievement could be a serious drain on society's reservoir of talent.

In what is probably his last written comment on this problem, L.M.Terman (1958) stated:

"Failure to make the most of our intellectual resources has been thoroughly documented by several recent researches, especially by those
of Wolfle and the National Manpower Council. Wolfle estimates that 41 per cent of our youths who rate in the top 1 per cent for tested ability either do not enter college, or, if they enter, do not remain to graduate. He further estimates that of those who have the intelligence to earn a Ph.D., less than 2 per cent do so. Of my large group of gifted children with IQ's of 140 or higher who were located in California thirty-five years ago, 15 per cent did not enter college and 30 per cent did not graduate. Though all of these presumably had the ability to earn a Ph.D., M.D., or their equivalent, only 15 per cent of the men and 5 per cent of women did so."

Recognition of academic underachievement as a serious psychological problem reflects the values of culture which attempt to look beyond performance to potential; maintains a prolonged compulsory system of education; seeks to nurture and develop diversity of abilities within and among individuals, concerns itself with the maximum development of the individual as well as his contribution to society.

While backwardness relates educational attainments to chronological age and hence to the level of work reached by the majority of a child's contemporaries, underachievement or underfunctioning relates it solely to the capacity of the individual pupil. In the one case a group norm serves as the yardstick, in the other it is the learning ability of the particular child in question.

The needs of children who are either educationally backward, slow learning or both, have received considerable attention in recent years. Though provision to meet their needs still remains inadequate, at least
they are fairly well understood. This is by no means the case with regard to underachievement. Far too often it is still thought - by parents and even by teachers - that if a child does badly at school he must be either stupid or lazy or possibly both; large classes and inexperienced teachers are also made to take a share of the blame. That intellectually able children may, in their school-work, not reach the level of their own age group, is an idea which has been particularly slow in gaining acceptance.

**Incidence of Underachievement**

In recent years, as manpower reserves of talent for scientific and professional occupations have been depleted, more and more attention is being directed to the salvaging of significant portion of the youth who qualify for the title of gifted underachievers.

A study of 4,900 bright high school students conducted in New York City in the Talent Preservation Project (Krägman, 1960) reports that when halfway through high school, 54 per cent of the boys and 33 per cent of the girls had scholastic averages which were already so low that their admission to college was in doubt. These students represented the high-ability populations of their classes (selected from a total population of 50,000) in 39 academic high schools; and of the 4,900, only 20 per cent were able to complete the first three terms of senior high school without faltering at some point by receiving grades below 85.
It is pointed out in the Report of the Education Commission (1964-66):

... the group of underachievers consists of children who are not intellectually dull, but are at least of average and may even be of superior ability. The failure of such children should of great concern to a developing country like ours (India) which can not remain indifferent to this loss of potential man power within the higher ability range.

Concept of Underachievement

Who are these underachievers? What are their backgrounds? What can the teachers and parents do to help them? These questions have concerned researchers. Investigations related to underachievement have been many and varied and have subjected the problem to a thorough-going analysis from many points of view. In the typical study, two groups from a particular grade level are identified. The experimental group, usually called underachievers, is defined as those with a marked discrepancy between potential (as shown by ability tests) and performance (as shown by grades or achievement test scores). The control group consists of students who exhibit little or no discrepancy between their potential and performance. The two groups are usually examined for historical antecedents, socio-economic variables, personality and interest differences, study habits, personal and social adjustment problems. Statistical tests are applied to eliminate chance differences.

The problem of underachievement, reduced to its simplest terms is that certain students withdraw from activities their teachers think
important, and they approach certain activities which teachers deem to be less important. The earlier teachers direct their attention to motivation, the more likely they will be in a position to correct under-achievement. With a knowledge of the motivational factors that operate in the life of an underachiever, a sensitive teacher may be in a better position to help the student overcome any maladjustments that may be preventing achievement commensurate with his ability. Motivation of an underachieving pupil involves helping him develop purposes and expectations that will direct his activities and behaviour toward the fulfillment of long-term aspirations, and ambitions.

Place of Guidance and Counselling

One of the most important things a school can do to increase the motivation of underachieving pupils is to provide adequate guidance and counselling services. The Education Commission (1964-66) have made strong recommendations with regard to the establishment of a Guidance and Counselling Centre in every School.

"One of the main functions of guidance at the secondary level is to aid in the identification and development of the abilities and interests of adolescent pupils. It helps these pupils to understand their own strengths and limitations and to do scholastic work at the level of their ability .... The role of the Counsellor in the promotion of talent can be very important."

(pp 239 - 241)
The Year Book of Education (1955) defines guidance broadly as a process of helping individuals through their own efforts, to discover and develop their potentialities for both personal happiness and social usefulness.

The central reason for the existence of counselling is based on the fact that pupils have problems that they are unable to resolve by themselves. Counselling psychologists intend to help others. They share this goal with a variety of other professionals such as Physicians, Psychiatrists and Social Workers. They aspire to operate within a scientific framework in which causes and effects are known, processes are understood and established truth is the guide rather than some abiding faith. However, with most of the Counsellors, faith appears to be more abundant than truth. Perhaps, to a large extent faith may be a sufficient justification for much of what counselling psychologists do eventhough the empirical establishment of behaviour modification is desirable from the point of view of a researcher.

The heart of the counselling process is the interview. Correl (1959) states:

The Counselling process may be construed as a learning process instituted and maintained in an atmosphere removed from daily pressure of work, study, grades and compelling social demands. It differs from the usual classroom learning situation in that the understanding to be derived are usually more closely associated with the learner's own personal needs, his happiness and his sense of security and well-being.
Counselling Underachievers – Earlier attempts

Various counselling techniques were employed by researchers to solve the problem of underachievement. Marx (1959) tried the methods of individual counselling with one group and group counselling with another group of underachievers. The achievement of the control group and that of the experimental group did not differ significantly.

Koppers and Caplan (1962) attempted the techniques of vocational counselling and therapy to alter underachievement patterns, but the results were not encouraging. Andrews (1969) used a combination of desensitization and reinforcement techniques upon one group of underachievers and client-centred counselling upon a similar group. No improvement in academic achievement occurred in either group. Evidently the motivational patterns of the underachievers remained unaffected.

Present Study

The present study was undertaken to determine whether or not high school male underachievers who participate in an academic counselling programme would achieve significantly higher in an academic achievement test at the conclusion of the counselling period in comparison with the control group of non-counsellled underachievers and normal achievers. Modified techniques of counselling were used to increase the motivation of the underachievers. Biographies of eminent men were prepared and read out during the counselling sessions. A talk on the influence of Attention,
Interest and Effort on the learning process was tape recorded and played during the counselling sessions. Additionally, group discussions and quiz programmes on school subjects as well as general knowledge were held to increase their self-confidence and arouse their interest in academic achievement.