

Gifted education globally and in relation to Aotearoa-New Zealand

Abstract: This report looks first at how giftedness is interpreted and catered for in countries around the world, including the ways in which different administrations have provided official support for gifted educational provision. Summaries are given of a number of workshops presented at the US National Association for Gifted Children's 2017 annual convention which could be relevant to this country. The history of gifted education in Aotearoa-New Zealand is briefly reviewed, and its current status is described. Drawing on this collected material, a number of specific practical suggestions are made for improvements to our current provision for gifted students, with particular reference to those which it is thought might be relevant for or of specific interest to the Ministry.

1. An international overview

How does a country decide what it should do for its gifted children and young people?

Different countries have different answers to this question, answers shaped by tradition, culture, ethical concerns, religious or spiritual beliefs, even politics; they may be influenced over time by emerging research, demographic changes or economic developments. Rose Blackett, a New Zealand psychologist and a member of the international SENG Board of Directors, undertook an exploration of how giftedness was perceived in various different cultures. Her findings, summarised below, were fascinating.

For example, in **China**, the concept of giftedness is influenced by Confucianism. The scholar is respected above all other persons. Learning without thinking is seen as producing ignorance. Knowledge is valued more highly than creativity, and thus schooling is more rigidly based on knowledge acquisition, with little opportunity to explore or express feelings. Education is seen as the route to success and there is a concern to foster the highly gifted student, but only within this fairly narrow set of perceptions.

In **Germany**, there appears to be historically a strong national self-image of exceptional cultural and scientific achievement. For example, before World War II, 25% of all the Nobel prizes in various aspects of science had gone to Germans. There had been a break during the Third Reich, but in the 70s there was a renewal of interest in gifted students. Currently, the country is still in an experimental phase, with widely differing approaches to the criteria for admittance to programmes and to strategies like acceleration.

In **Turkey**, the country was ruled by the Ottoman Empire from the 13th century right up until the 19th century. Although the Empire did not accept responsibility for the education of all citizens until the 19th century, giftedness as a phenomenon was recognised, viewed through a combination of Islamic belief and Turkish folk lore. Logical judgement was one criterion. Having an exceptional memory was another: the "reciter" was especially valued. Today, gifted education is growing, but is largely economically driven and is only just beginning to consider the links between cognitive development and its historical cultural perspectives.

In **Slavic** countries, attention has been given in both psychology and pedagogy to the study of creativity and the role of emotions in both creativity and cognition and as the foundation of motivation. Strongly influenced by traditional cultural beliefs and mythology, their research is based

on the Slavic concept of the spirit and the soul, and affirms these dynamic and holistic beliefs. These views help shape their perception of giftedness.

In **Japan**, giftedness does not officially exist. Education is very prescriptive, with textbooks having to be officially approved. Task perseverance is seen as highly important. But there are “Super” high schools with a focus on English or Science, reflecting the country’s concern to promote itself as an economic and technological power. Since the 1990s, unofficially at least, there has been a growing recognition that giftedness means more than academic achievement, but definitions are variable and ambiguous and the main focus is still on achievement.

In **England** (not the UK as a whole), the National Association for Gifted and Talented Youth was established at the University of Warwick in 1999. They work to a broad definition of giftedness, including talents but not limited to this. They are committed to the view that socioeconomic status should not be a factor in gaining admittance to gifted programmes, use a variety of identification criteria, and are trying to reach into schools to influence provision. (Two of their staff came to New Zealand and looked intensively at One Day School, borrowing some ideas from that programme for their UK work).

Provision for the gifted in the **United States** is well described as almost defying definition. Conflicting concepts are found. Different states have different approaches. Indigenous and other cultural minority students have little chance of being recognised. Yet more research has come out of the US than from anywhere else, and it is the home of the movement towards recognition of the inner self of the gifted child, while at the same time it has also produced the strongest official statements with a focus on talent development and achievement. Education in the US is more prescriptive than most of us may realise, so such official pronouncements are important, but they have not produced a consistency of approach.

Within countries, some cultures have interestingly different perceptions. **Australian Aborigine** culture, for example, has its roots deeply entwined in the Dreamtime, a spiritual understanding of creation and the nature of the world that leads to a respect for the land and a valuing of the skills, intellectual and physical, which enable them to survive in that land. They have a strong sense of family and community, so everything is shared, and the most able contribute their skills to the community well-being.

Rose Blackett in her research also found the following culturally determined examples:

Native American **Navajo** people place value on living in balance and harmony with oneself. Giftedness is related to qualities of character and spirit, translated into concrete skills and abilities, and linked to the concept of service to the community. Their ideal of beauty is linked, not to physical attributes, but to the possession of those transcendental qualities.

In the **Philippines**, family is very important, and cooperation is an expected part of life. Giftedness is linked to intelligence, and again the expectation is that it will be used for the common good. The role of the gifted is an extension of the belief that every individual contributes beneficially to society.

The **Shona** people of central and southern Africa, living in a subsistence economy, are very dependent on everyone in the community participating, and have a saying which graphically expresses this – “It takes more than one fingernail to squash a louse”. They too have ideas about

giftedness rooted in their spiritual beliefs. They see the gifted as having or deserving a degree of eminence, but in practical terms think giftedness is context specific. For example, they value exceptional ability in conflict resolution: in such an interwoven community, one can see why this would be thought particularly important.

World Council reports

Another source of information comes from the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children which annually publishes the reports it has received from its member countries. Not all submit material, but its 2017 edition, released in August, contained 15 such reports, summarised below.

Surprisingly, in view of its history in the field, the **United States** report is the least informative. Referring briefly to the Jacob K. Javits programme which provides some funding for gifted projects, it gives short descriptors of 12 such projects which were collectively presented in just one session at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. It notes that the Association has published a list of the “Top 20 Principles” for dealing with gifted children, and mentions that the NAGC annual convention will be held in November. Nothing more is added.

A sad report is included from a dispirited educator in **Ecuador**. Writing of poverty, inequality and community disintegration in her country, she noted that there is no official support for gifted education, and an almost complete lack of interest from teachers. She herself, however, belongs to the Sueno Magico Institute, which she describes as an “extracurricular centre for the development of scientific talent”. It seems to be a very small new or fairly new body, without any funding support, but with high aims for achieving change in attitudes towards the gifted. It evidently has a major task ahead.

Other countries were able to report more positively, some with ideas that might well be relevant for Aotearoa-New Zealand. **Switzerland**, for instance, offers study programmes in gifted education for teachers and reports that about 30 advanced study certificates and 10 to 20 masters degrees are being awarded each year. In 2016 it hosted a large international conference, which included a special panel for principals, education authorities and policy-makers, recognising the crucial importance of these people if gifted education is to be fostered. They have a Network for Gifted Education made up of representatives from the education boards in each canon.

In **Saudi Arabia**, another actively involved country, provision for gifted students is strongly backed by the King as well as by the Ministry of Education. Currently the Kingdom has 82 gifted centres, 50 for males and 32 for females. They report that so far these centres have catered for 41,579 male students and 5586 female students. There is a strong focus on “scientific creativity”, with 4343 schools participating in an Olympics-style competition for projects in that field.

The Research Council in **Oman** is conducting a national three-year research study on recognising and nurturing gifted students. Both the Research Council and the Oman Ministry of Education have funded teacher workshops, with an emphasis on science and on critical thinking skills. An interesting addition was a workshop on creativity for gifted students with disabilities. Oman’s Ministry of Education joined with Ministries from other Gulf states in March 2017 in the “Gulf Giftedness and Creativity Day”. As well as various adult papers and seminars, a “student activities fair” was held, featuring student project work, creative works and other initiatives.

In **Egypt**, the focus is very strongly on STEM subjects. The Ministry of Education issued a decree to establish STEM schools, and has given this high priority, aiming to provide STEM students with a high quality education that will “reinforce their potential skills and equip them with tools required to lead the ship”. This is described in the report as “a turning point” in Egyptian education. The curriculum has been set by the Ministry, based around the specific challenges Egypt faces, such as over-population and improving water resources. The report concludes with a strong statement about the potential economic contribution gifted students can make to their country’s future, and this, rather than the needs of the students themselves, is the main focus.

Gifted education appears to be in a very healthy state in **Israel**. The Ministry of Education has a Department for Gifted and Talented, and in conjunction with the Prime Minister’s office liaises with the “Future Scientists Centre” on several programmes, mainly with a focus on science but including one which combines the humanities and the sciences. More than 1000 students participate in these programmes. The Maimonides Fund’s Centre for the Advancement of the Gifted and Talented is pioneering an “alumni community” of science professionals to influence and inspire future scientists. There is a high school academy programme, in 2017 involving some 770 students who worked with local municipalities on local issues such as transportation. The “co-facilitators” programme supported 15 students undertaking research within a mentored academic programme. At primary level, Israel celebrated 10 years of its flagship “Amirim” programme, based on Renzulli’s talent development approach.

Returning to Europe, **Sweden** appears to be going through a period of awakening to the needs of gifted students. The topic is not a requirement in teacher education, “almost no” school has a gifted coordinator and there is no specific certification for such a position. However, the Swedish delegate also reports evidence of growing interest amongst teachers, supported through various network groups. In 2016 no fewer than three national conferences were held, evidently with a curriculum focus – one at least was on mathematics. Of interest to this country, the report also cited the work of two people who are both graduates of the New Zealand REACH course. Wally Mann is described as now working as a “special pedagogue”, being called on to share his acquired knowledge with other teachers at various events. Saima Asif is collaborating with the writer of the Swedish report on the establishment of a cross-curricular group to discuss the needs of gifted students, including social-emotional needs. They have presented to a conference of International Baccalaureate Schools, receiving a “thrilling” response, and are now planning further collaborative work with Stockholm schools and aiming to extend throughout Sweden in 2018.

Finland seems to have been less involved than some of its neighbours, with little provision for gifted students. However it has a new curriculum which, while avoiding the word “gifted”, does advocate differentiation for “students with talents” and “students who learn rapidly”. The Nordic Talent Network chose to hold its fourth convention in Finland in 2016, and the report seems to feel that, together with the new curriculum, these are hopeful signs for the future.

Norway is also experimenting with terminology. “Gifted” and “able” are now replaced by “high learning potential” for the top 15% of students and by “exceptional learning potential” for the top 5% of students. These changes came out of a public report on the state of Norway’s provision for these students, but this World Council report states that little notice has been taken of its findings as yet. One potentially significant step however was the specific inclusion of gifted students in a major

study of bullying, grief and psychological distress. Some of those students have made recommendations to teachers on strategies that could help them to cope with such issues.

Further south, the report from **Spain** is not altogether clear, but the implication seems to be that little provision is made in Spain itself. However, in Catalonia, there appears to be more activity. The Official College of Psychology and the College of Pedagogy each has a Working Group of High Intellectual Ability, and together with two family associations, they have undertaken several studies, the commission of precocity, a high school commission, a protocol committee, an expertise committee and an acceleration commission. These various enquiries have set up a long-term study of gifted development, an educational plan for high school students, a review of protocols relating to the gifted, and steps towards an accreditation process for teachers of the gifted, and have published material relating to overseas research on acceleration. They have also had a meeting with the wonderfully named “Commission’s Attention to the Diversity of the Department of Education of the Generalitat of Catalonia”, although no outcome is reported.

Moving across the world, **Mexico** reported significant progress on several fronts, with growing numbers of gifted students being identified, more than half through a “Talent Attention Centre”. 2017 saw Mexico’s second national conference, with some 850 delegates; annual such conferences are now to be held. The Mexican Alliance for Giftedness has set up a programme aimed at helping gifted students in rural areas, with around a hundred students so far identified. A Gifted Tournament was held for the first time in 2017, with a focus on scientific competitions. Finally, the Mexican House of Representatives has set up a commission on giftedness with the aim of establishing a “comprehensive law” ensuring the needs of gifted students are recognised and met.

Brazil has an impressive history, with its best-known programme for gifted students having been initiated by the State Secretary of Education back in 1976. To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of this programme, the Special Education Department promoted a range of activities throughout the country, including events such as a competition to design a commemorative stamp, scientific and artistic exhibitions, and so on, involving in all some 1600 students and many teachers. An end of year event enabled students to exchange experiences, explain research projects, demonstrate prototypes, and display art works such as paintings, artworks, sculptures and published books. A strong Parent, Teacher and Friends Association also actively promotes provision for the gifted and in 2016 met with parliamentarians to assert the need for official policies. Some financial support for teaching resources was a first outcome, and an official Day of the Gifted is to be celebrated every November.

Heading down to our own part of the world, the report from **Australia** opens with an account of its Gifted Awareness Week, which this year included a Digital Tool Kit sent out to schools, individuals and businesses around the country. An update is given on the work of the various gifted associations in each state. A “first” was the award of 34 university scholarships to teachers to enable them to study giftedness, made by the Academy of Accredited SEAL Schools. SEAL is the acronym for Select Entry Accelerated Learning, set up originally by the Victorian Department of Education, with certain secondary schools officially identified as those which use this approach. Victoria has also had an officially funded outreach programme for gifted Year 5 and 6 students since 2015, but funding for this has now been taken over by one of the SEAL schools, MacRobertson Girls’ High, catering for 30 gifted students at that younger age level.

Since Australia is our nearest neighbour, it is perhaps appropriate to add to this report that the University of New South Wales UNSW is the home of GERRIC, the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, which for years has actively promoted research and teaching in this field. However, concern has frequently been expressed about inadequate provision for the gifted, with a recent article in *Education Week* (probably the nearest Australian publication to our own *Education Gazette*) reiterating these concerns, citing amongst others Dr Jae Jung, a Senior Lecturer at the School of Education at UNSW and editor of the *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*. Dr Jung stressed the lack of teacher education in this field. Part of the problem may be the fact that policy on gifted education differs from state to state, and despite a national commission held some years ago, no consistent national approach appears yet to have emerged.

Finally, the World Council includes a report from **New Zealand**. This begins with a report on the "Gifted Roadshow", an initiative by giftEDnz which involved holding a workshop in each of the three main centres rather than one larger workshop or conference. The election of a new president for the NZAGC was recorded, and it was noted that the University of Waikato had taken responsibility for upgrading the Ministry's gifted website and mailing list. It was reported that a new online course for teachers had been started by the University of Auckland, and other available courses at Massey, Waikato and REACH were listed. Lastly, it was noted that several New Zealand educators or researchers had presented at the most recent World Conference which was held in Sydney.

Interim comment

The diversity in provision for the gifted which is apparent from the above overview reflects two main and rather different approaches. Most common appears to be a focus on the potential for high levels of achievement, with a particular emphasis on science and scientific creativity, and with a link clearly being made to the country's economic future and prosperity. Less commonly expressed is a concern for the welfare of the individual gifted student and for his or her personal emotional and social development as a child who encounters many differences in relating to age peers and in having to stay within age-based expectations at school and in the community. One might without too much exaggeration say that the difference is between asking what should we do for the gifted child and asking what can the gifted child do for us. A different debate might lie in considering how these two aims might be brought together and met in a balanced way.

Another noteworthy point is that in many countries the Ministry or Department of Education has accepted primary responsibility for gifted provision, has developed policies or initiatives, has funded a variety of activities, or has in other ways supported the gifted as an integral part of a country's education system. Where there is such official support, there gifted provision appears to be most effective.

A range of practical ideas also emerges from this overview, and these will be discussed later.

2. The NAGC Convention

The United States National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) was founded in 1954 and is believed to be the largest such association in the world. Its membership embraces educators, psychologists, researchers, parents and students, and includes many of the world's leading figures in the field, people like Joseph Renzulli, Linda Silverman, Karen Rogers, James Delisle, Michael

Piechowski, Del Siegle, Dorothy Sisk, and many more. It is a very active organisation, with many different functions, and offers its members the opportunity to belong to a number of internally-organised networks representing different aspects of giftedness, such as global awareness, conceptual foundations, parent and community, early childhood, GRACE (Gifted Racial Accountability & Commitment to Equity), and so on.

One of the NAGC's functions is its annual convention. In 2017 this was held in Charlotte in North Carolina, and was attended by around 2500 delegates. I was attending in order to accept on behalf of this country the NAGC Professional Development Network Award for 2017, and took the opportunity to attend as many of the workshops on offer as I could. The first day was mainly about registration, an opening address, social functions and the like. The main activity was spread across the next two days. In addition to an extensive poster session and a massive book and equipment display, a staggering 406 workshops and roundtable discussions were presented across these two days. Clearly it was impossible to attend more than a tiny fraction of this rich offering, so the most sensible tactic seemed to be to select a range of topics that might be relevant for Aotearoa-New Zealand. My notes from those workshops which proved to be most relevant are recorded below.

Two workshops on controversial topics

One issue that came up in more than one workshop was the emergence of concepts which try to prove that giftedness or aspects of it do not exist. There have always been people who have come up with a variety of reasons for refusing to acknowledge the reality of exceptional ability, but the most recent debates have been about (a) mindset and (b) openness to experience as alternative explanations for observed high levels of performance or achievement.

The proponents of mindset – referred to by people at the convention as “grit” – argue that sustained effort is the key to such performance, not inherent ability, and therefore, the argument goes, almost anyone with sufficient perseverance can reach those high levels. The argument for openness to experience is in opposition to the research on intensity of perception and response as an inherent characteristic of giftedness. Again, the argument is that everyone can be open to experience, regardless of intellect, and that therefore notions about intensity are superfluous. Some also appear to argue that high levels of openness to experience are a truer indicator of giftedness than intensity. If either of these concepts is correct, then support for the gifted would be unjustified, or so the proponents believe.

Both these concepts have been the subject of concerned discussion on New Zealand's tki gifted mailing list over the past year, so it seemed appropriate to see what the response was at the convention.

Mindset

The notion of mindset or “grit” as the sole or primary arbiter of high achievement appeared to be fairly roundly dismissed, one delegate remarking that grit was what he felt in his swimming togs after a day at the beach. In a different session dealing with the same topic, another contributor, Stephanie Tolan, pointed to verified instances of children speaking at an exceptionally early age, citing one who was talking in short sentences at the age of six months. As she said, that child cannot have had the 10,000 hours of practice supposedly required for exceptional performance. No-one

disputed the need for sustained effort as a *factor* in the level of performance reached, but the general consensus appeared to be that, in basic terms, you could try as hard as you liked with something, but unless you also had an inherent talent in that field, you'd never achieve stardom. No amount of practice would turn every bathroom soprano into a Kiri te Kanawa, to use a Kiwi comparison.

Openness to experience

This is a concept which has come forward more recently in debates around giftedness. It is a harder argument to follow, both because it is more difficult to define than "grit" and because it seems so very different from intensity: it is not clear why one should rule the other out. Speaking first, Dr Sheila Gallagher, acknowledging that there certainly is research showing that those with a high IQ do tend to show higher scores for openness to experience, nonetheless firmly put forward the view that intensity (or overexcitabilities, to use the original term for this construct) is an entirely different quality. Intensity, she stated, was a core personality attribute present from birth, whereas openness to experience is a trait which develops over time. This seemed to resonate with the view that openness to experience may also partly be a reflection of an individual's life experiences, including how that individual has been treated by others. There also seemed to be no justification for implying that openness to experience is specific to giftedness: Dr Gallagher rejected that assumption, saying that openness to experience could not adequately describe giftedness, but suggesting that in gifted individuals, intensity often was aligned with intuition and openness to experience.

Professor Barbara Kerr sought to explain the opposing point of view by referring to the lives of various eminent individuals, stating that all had clearly possessed openness to experience and all had demonstrated high levels of creativity and innovation. She did not explain why this necessarily meant that such openness was confined to the gifted or was a better identifier of giftedness than intensity. Seeking to define openness to experience, she listed breadth, depth and permeability of consciousness, and the recurrent need to enlarge and examine experience, and argued for a change in education to support the identification of individuals with these qualities, speaking of creative gathering into a creative community. She then went on to speak about acceleration and enrichment, but the point she was making in relation to openness to experience was difficult to see, at least for this listener. Her overall argument also seemed unconvincing, again at least for this listener, but her definition was usefully thought-provoking. Perhaps the best solution to this debate is simply to include openness to experience as a characteristic which, like some other characteristics, may be found to a greater degree in some gifted individuals than in the general population.

Afro-American attitudes to giftedness

A very different session was one which focussed on Afro-American giftedness. From the descriptor it had seemed to be a presentation on this as a topic, which I thought might provide interesting comparisons with Maori perceptions of giftedness. It turned out to be an award ceremony for three young black women, high school students aged about 15 or 16, who had won scholarships for university study, but the comparisons with Maori were still very clearly there. It was first of all very much a whanau experience: virtually the entire audience seemed to be there specifically to support one or other of the three girls: not only the girls' families but also some of their teachers including at least one principal had come in support. There was an intense sense of pride in what these girls had accomplished – the whole room positively vibrated with it: it was tangible. The session concluded

with a powerfully-worded address to the girls from a woman who was obviously a highly respected black leader in some field. What she had to say to these young women was not about their opportunity for success and achievement, but about their opportunity to become leaders and role models for other young black women, to serve their community in that way. It was an uplifting session to attend, in so many ways reminiscent of what one experiences with Maori, yet I could not help but notice that there appeared to be only one other white person apart from me in that packed room, and of 406 workshops and a plethora of posters, I found just one keynote, three posters and six workshops, including this one, which concerned provision for different racial groups, black, Latino or Native American. One cannot fairly draw conclusions about attitudes to racial minorities in the NAGC which after all does have its GRACE network and had given one keynote to a black speaker, but it was a useful reminder that we too need to be conscious of not letting Maori (and also Pasifika) giftedness slip below the Pakeha radar as something of concern only to Maori.

Under-representation of various groups in gifted programmes

The question of under-representation was also discussed in a session entitled “Equity and Access”, led by Katie Lewis, one of the NAGC’s coordinators, and Angela Novak. They very strongly made the point that teacher knowledge and expectation is one of the major factors in under-representation of gifted students from poor families or from various racial groups. They emphasised the need for targeted teacher training, describing this as critical in achieving change. Teachers needed to understand cultural perceptions and to be aware of the culturally determined characteristics shaping children’s behaviour. Katie Lewis summarised this as a simple mantra for teachers: “Know your babies”.

Teacher beliefs in relation to teacher practice

Another workshop with very considerable interest for gifted provision in Aotearoa-New Zealand was presented by Professor Susan Johnsen and Corina Kaul, reporting on their research into teacher beliefs as a guide to teacher development needs. They had undertaken an online survey which involved 507 teachers, representing 151 schools in Texas, from all levels of schooling, 95% of them being state schools, the remainder charter or private schools. Most of these teachers appeared to have some particular involvement with gifted provision in their schools. Professor Johnsen subsequently made a copy of their report and of its summary available to me, and I am drawing on that for the following material rather than my own necessarily shorter on-the-spot notes.

Johnsen and Kaul’s purpose was to try to determine what factors were influencing lack of progress by gifted students. Thus their research had examined teachers’ beliefs regarding the efficacy of instructional practices such as ability grouping, use of assessments, curriculum differentiation, acceleration, and collaboration with others, compared with the teachers’ reports on how frequently they actually used the identified instructional practices and their views on obstacles to implementation. Johnsen and Kaul noted that “The need for this research was underscored by the fact that over 50% of the schools did not evaluate program effectiveness”

Delivery methods: Overwhelmingly the preference was for pull-out groupings, used by 47% of the teachers involved. One third reported having gifted-only classes, and one third said gifted provision was made simply through “general education”. (Here as elsewhere figures add up to more than

100% as some schools used more than one approach). Advanced placement was used by just 17%, and 16% reported having “cluster classrooms”.

Professional development: 86% of the teachers had completed the 30 “clock hours” of gifted PLD which is a basic pre-requisite in the state of Texas, and most had added their annual 6-hour update. Almost half had taken courses in gifted education; 28% had at least one graduate level course in gifted education, and 13% held a master’s degree with a specialisation in gifted education. The question was, how far would translate into classroom practice?

Implementation: Johnsen and Kaul found that implementation of the practices did not necessarily follow the beliefs in the practices. Their table summarising their findings makes this clear:

GT Beliefs: Teacher Agreement and Regularity of Practice

Belief	Agree	Practice-Weekly	Practice-Monthly	Practice-Rarely	Practice-Never
1. Work with Parents	99%	25%	40%	32%	4%
2. Deeper and More Complex Curriculum	99%	71%	21%	6%	1%
3. Ability Grouping	98%	78%	17%	3%	2%
4. Create Products Matched to Interests	98%	36%	46%	15%	3%
5. Flexible Pacing	98%	52%	28%	11%	8%
6. Above-Level Work	97%	65%	25%	7%	3%
7. Above-Grade Content	97%	41%	29%	14%	15%
8. Independent Research	96%	28%	40%	27%	6%
9. Mentoring	95%	15%	16%	28%	42%
10. Different Learning Experiences	91%	65%	24%	8%	3%
11. Rubrics	89%	31%	50%	15%	4%
12. Above-Level Assessment	87%	26%	34%	23%	17%
13. Placement with Higher Grade Students	84%	26%	9%	13%	52%
Average	94%	43%	29%	16%	12%

It is worth noting that there is a very considerable difference in impact and value for the student between a strategy which is implemented at least weekly as opposed to implementation only monthly.

Learning outcomes: Teachers were also asked to identify the learning outcomes they had noted as a result of using these various instructional strategies. They reported significant benefits, detailing in some depth positive outcomes both socially and emotionally and in terms of academic progress.

Obstacles to implementation: The teachers in the survey listed a number of factors that limited their ability to implement these various strategies, including lack of confidence, lack of support from other teachers, lack of administration support, the district curriculum, district policies and lack of resources. The degree to which these factors impacted on teachers varied considerably from strategy to strategy. For example, only 6% lacked confidence when it came to acceleration but 24% lacked confidence in using rubrics. However the biggest obstacle reported by teachers was the lack of resources, rising to 52% in relation to the implementation of some strategies. Next came the district curriculum which limited teachers' ability to work flexibly with gifted students up to 44% of the time.

Recommendations: Johnsen and Kaul made a very detailed set of recommendations, dealing firstly with *improving the services offered to gifted students*. They noted the need for time to be given to such services, for more personalised provision, wider use of acceleration, a more flexible curriculum, improved access to resources including assessment tools and more research on the effects of different strategies. Next they recommended attention to several quite specific *professional development* areas, eg the design and use of assessment measures and of rubrics, and working in partnership with other interested parties. They emphasized the need for *advocacy*, and linked this to the need for school districts to provide more resources and support. Finally, they stressed the importance of support from *policy makers*, listing particularly concerns about the implications for gifted students of standardised assessments, and the need for greater investment in both human and material resources. They noted the use of financial incentives for schools to take a more inclusive approach and suggested that policy makers should re-visit the requirements for teacher preparation in gifted education, making them equivalent to the requirements in other special education fields.

Comparing these findings with our situation in Aotearoa-New Zealand, there is firstly undoubtedly a much higher level of specific PLD in this area than we would find amongst New Zealand teachers, and consequently a higher level of understanding of the enormous value of specific instructional strategies than we might expect to find in our country. Our 2008 ERO Report would suggest that the use of the various delivery and instructional strategies is also lower in this country. Yet there is still a considerable gap evident in the results of this US survey between belief on the one hand and implementation on the other. It is very relevant therefore to look at the perceived obstacles to implementation. All of them should be remediable obstacles, some achievable relatively quickly through policy changes and better resourcing, others requiring longer term attitudinal change, and thus dependent on sustained education in this field.

Global awareness as a gifted education construct

One of the NAGC networks is Global Awareness, where the primary goal is to work towards a more peaceful and more compassionate world, with a proactive concern for the environment and for all those who are suffering from poverty, disease, war and other such ills. Inherent in the concept of global awareness is recognition of empathy towards suffering and a concern for justice as frequently observed characteristics in young gifted individuals. Increasingly often, researchers and

practitioners in the gifted field are noting a link to spirituality or spiritual awareness in such young people. Dorothy Sisk addressed this in an interesting workshop about what is now being termed “spiritual intelligence”. Commenting that peace-building represented perhaps the greatest global challenge – even climate change cannot be tackled without peaceful cooperation between nations – she spoke of the need to begin with helping gifted young people first to build their own inner peace, of learning how to build a “zone of peace” around oneself. a necessary basis for strong and effective leaders in the search for a more caring world. She spoke also of helping young people to discover commonalities – the recognition of “just like me” in others – how other people too seek happiness, want to avoid suffering, may also experience sadness, loneliness, despair – as a basis for understanding how to reach out to others. She cited the inspiration provided by the example of various “peace heroes”, such as Bertha von Suttner, the first woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, Linus Pauling and Albert Einstein as scientists who worked for peace, Gandhi and the Dalai Lama as advocates of non-violent protest, Martin Luther King calling for racial equity, and Nelson Mandela’s ability to forgive: all these people can be an encouragement to others about what is possible.

This is an area largely outside most of our gifted programmes, but can we deny the need for more cooperative and caring relationships globally, across cultures, across religions, across communities? Given Aotearoa-New Zealand’s history in matters such as protest against nuclear warships and apartheid and our struggle to make our bi-cultural heritage an integral part of our national and individual sense of identity, perhaps the concept of global awareness should be more regularly brought into the work we do with our gifted students.

(I was subsequently introduced to Dorothy Sisk who has given me two books which are an example of very simple texts about compassion for others which could be used with younger children).

New assessment tool

In addition to these various workshops, discussions with various people, visiting the book display and viewing posters all proved interesting. Two items in particular seem worth mentioning here.

Firstly, I learned of a new assessment tool called the “World Game”. I understand it involves a hands-on construction set which requires a child to build a model village. Developed in Denmark, early research on its use seems promising, and may be of particular interest for Aotearoa-New Zealand as it’s a tool which has no cultural or language barriers. It is intended for use by a psychologist rather than a classroom teacher and requires specific training. I am seeking to learn more about this and about how we might bring it to this country.

Child-centred gifted advocacy

Secondly, Dr Linda Silverman is seeking to establish a Child-Centred Gifted Advocacy Collective, to provide an international forum for discussion around a holistic as opposed to a measurable-achievement focus for gifted education. A holistic focus does not overlook achievement; indeed it is an integral aspect. But the holistic approach recognises the impact giftedness can have on a child’s emotional, social and ethical development, perception of experience and interaction with other children and adults, and has a caring concern for these aspects of the child’s development as well as for his or her success in performance. I’ve automatically been given membership of this collective because this approach has been central to my own work from the very beginning of my involvement

in the gifted field, but it may have wider relevance for us here in that it links to our own tradition of a child-centred education system.

3. Gifted education in Aotearoa-New Zealand

[a] *Our current situation: how we got to where we are now*

There have always been a few individuals – educators, academics and psychologists – who have recognised the need to make specific provision for gifted students. Particularly worthy of note are George Parkyn, writing as early as 1948 about “children of high intelligence” in the New Zealand context, Don McAlpine, setting up the first paper ever to be offered at a New Zealand university, his colleague Neil Reid, working at the NZCER, Dave Freeman, using his position as a school inspector to encourage schools to make some effort for these children, Elwyn Richardson, with his tiny but outstanding creative writing programme in West Auckland, and Elaine Le Sueur, singlehandedly masterminding our first international conference. The old Education Department occasionally showed some interest, though not always entirely coherently, as in the year in which not one but two reports on gifted education were produced, each contradicting the other. Roger Moltzen has comprehensively summarised these earlier years in his opening chapter in *Gifted and Talented: New Zealand Perspectives* (eds McAlpine & Moltzen, 1996), with my own chapter in that book having some additional information.

But historically, we have largely neglected our gifted students. This is a topic which has never routinely been part of our pre-service teacher education. Even when it has been included, it has generally been essentially lip-service – three hours in a three-year course, for instance. It has also not routinely been included in the training of psychologists or counsellors or special needs teachers. This sustained national absence of concern appears most likely to reflect the widespread erroneous assumption that gifted students will automatically succeed at school without any special assistance, along with fears of elitism and mythological concepts such as “every child is gifted” or “it’s just pushy parents”, and so on. These attitudes continue: teachers taking our REACH course who in one of their tasks have to survey and report on the attitudes they encounter and colleagues working elsewhere in the field consistently say they still hear such views.

A stirring of interest seemed to become apparent during the 1990s. Roger Moltzen began offering a paper at the University of Waikato and worked with Don McAlpine to publish the book mentioned above, Elaine Le Sueur’s conference in 1992 attracted considerable numbers, Jill Bevan-Brown began publishing material on giftedness from a Maori perspective, Don McAlpine and Neil Reid produced the Teacher Observation Scales, the first New Zealand normed assessment tool, and in 1995 the George Parkyn Centre was established to provide a nationally-based forum for teachers, parents, children and researchers, with the One Day School programme beginning in the following year.

Following the 1999 election, a Ministerial Working Party was established, leading to some significant changes, some only temporary but others more enduring. Most importantly the education regulations were changed to make identifying and catering for gifted students mandatory for schools. Honoured as frequently in the breach as in practice according to ERO’s 2008 report, this is nevertheless a vital foundation stone for gifted education in this country. Also important were the increase in the number of advisors, up from four full-time equivalents to 12, and the establishment of the gifted community on the tki website, in particular its mailing list which provided (and

continues to provide) a valuable forum for teachers to seek answers to questions and to discuss ideas. Some funding was provided for a three-year fixed term for a number of school-based development projects, which were intended to act as models for other schools (the “Talent Development Initiative” or TDI), and in 2006 the Ministry funded a conference in Wellington which attracted, from memory, about 600 people and led to the establishment of a professional association, giftEDnz. Thus at the end of the 90s and in the first years of the new century, there appeared to be real progress, with a firm basis being established for future growth.

[b] *Now we’ve got to 2018, where are we?*

In the years following the implementation of the Ministerial Working Party recommendations, there were a number of positive developments. The most obvious gain has been the increase in the number of teachers who now express interest in this field, as evidenced by the tki mailing list which, as noted, continues to be very active. In other gains, the NAG which requires schools to provide for gifted students, whether observed or not, stands as a significant symbol of hope for future growth in this field. GiftEDnz has been very active in promoting and supporting research, particularly with regard to early childhood and twice-exceptional students, and keeps its members well informed on events in this field. The REACH online course is now entering its 13th year of delivery, and REACH has continued to bring international leaders in gifted education to this country to participate in conferences and speaking tours. Massey introduced a post-graduate diploma course a few years ago, and three other universities have recently increased their involvement: Waikato and Victoria are, I understand, either resuming or planning to resume a paper or course in gifted education, and Auckland has begun to offer an online paper.

Also during this time, Jill Bevan-Brown’s work has been added to by the appearance of a number of writers from both Maori and Pasifika backgrounds. It’s important to mention this separately, because Maori people in particular have a conception of giftedness which is very different from that prevailing in Pakeha culture. There is a strong spiritual element to Maori beliefs, and the first emphasis is on the qualities of the individual. Skills and abilities come second and are subservient to qualities, and their development and manifestation is linked to service to the community. In these ways, Maori concepts share similarities with those of various other indigenous peoples – the views of the Navajo people are virtually identical (p.2). In building a definition or a concept of giftedness which is appropriate for Aotearoa-New Zealand, we have a unique opportunity to bring together into one powerful statement both Maori and Pakeha traditions; we will greatly enrich our work in this field if we can do so.

Thus the early years of this century did see very promising developments. However, over the past few years much of this forward impetus has slowed and in many respects gifted education has undeniably and very worryingly gone backward. Specifically:

[1] The TDI funding certainly supported a number of worthwhile school-based projects, but it does not appear to have been realised that projects which require funding to set up and maintain cannot be expected to act as models for schools which do not receive that funding. Even the schools which had that funding could not always maintain the projects once funding ceased.

[2] The gifted advisors provided an invaluable service for teachers, especially important given that teachers had generally had no training in this area and had no-one else to turn to for support. Yet the advisory positions were all abolished under the previous Government.

[3] No provision was made for enforcement of the NAG requiring schools to cater for their gifted students. A statement promulgated some 13 years ago and not officially clearly and specifically reiterated since is going to be an increasingly overlooked statement unless there is some form of oversight. Given the lack of teacher education in this field and the prevalence of misconceptions about giftedness, it is hardly surprising therefore that ERO found that about half of all schools were basically ignoring this regulation and that of the rest, only about 5% were doing it well. (2008 ERO report).

[4] Some PLD funding made available after the Working Party and channelled mainly through one particular organisation was demonstrably poorly targeted, for some years depressing or delaying efforts to improve gifted provision. There appeared to be no system in place, or no effective system, to maintain any oversight of this process. No specifically targeted funding appears at this precise moment in time to be available to support teachers' access to quality PLD. Hopefully that situation is about to change under the new Government, but the allocation of any such funding will need carefully set parameters including better provision for oversight and review.

[5] As Johnsen and Kaul and indeed other researchers have also found, the emphasis on "standards" and standardised testing has seriously disadvantaged both gifted students and their teachers, setting unreasonably low ceilings for assessment purposes and limiting programme flexibility. This emphasis on standards reinforces the very debatable view that gifted education is primarily or even solely about measurable achievement or performance.

[6] More recently, the decision to require schools to focus primarily on underachieving students, while absolutely justifiable in itself, has predictably led to many schools interpreting this as meaning that they do not have to be concerned about gifted students because, they believe, gifted students by definition are not underachievers. This is factually wholly incorrect. As research has repeatedly demonstrated, gifted students are a group very much at risk of underachievement for a raft of different reasons, including socio-economic circumstances, cultural differences, twice-exceptionality, behavioural issues arising from frustration and unhappiness at school and ranging from severe withdrawal to anger and antagonism, and, of course, because of inadequate and restrictive learning programmes at school. Those of us working in this field and trying to persuade schools of this simple truth repeatedly come up against the belief that in directing them to focus on underachieving students, the Ministry is also directing them to exclude the gifted.

[7] Similarly, the decision to establish an accreditation process for PLD providers was also absolutely justifiable and certainly very much needed, but as we at REACH found, the process initially fell down when it came to gifted education, at least in part because the accreditation panel did not have the expertise needed for this specialist area and repeated the same belief – that gifted students wouldn't meet the underachievement criteria. Conversely, I am aware of at least one provider who is giving teachers advice which directly conflicts with well-established research in the field. The existing accreditation system apparently did not have enough knowledge of the field to pick up that misleading and potentially very damaging lack of knowledge in this provider.

These various issues have all significantly impacted on gifted education in a range of ways. For example, the original George Parkyn Centre and the Gifted Kids Programme both found themselves struggling to survive financially and had to merge to try to reduce cost duplication, a sensible decision, but the new body still is in an ongoing search for funding to stay alive. Another example: just recently two of the three people employed by Waikato University to upgrade and manage the tki website have just been told that their contracts have been terminated; one person will now be required to do this job all by herself. Other examples could be quoted, but perhaps our experience at REACH can demonstrate this as clearly as anything could. I think it is fair to say that the REACH online course has amply demonstrated that it is of high quality. That was certainly attested to by the numerous affidavits from former participants which accompanied our accreditation application. We have previously won accreditation in Australia and endorsement by the US Institute for the Study of Advanced Development, and in 2017 we were awarded the US NAGC Professional Development Network Award. We have had enrolments not just from New Zealand but also from teachers in Australia, Thailand, Singapore, Sweden, China, the UK, Dubai and Jamaica. No other course in New Zealand has a record like this. Yet we struggle to survive. There is at present no funding to support what we do. Around half of the teachers who enrol with us pay for themselves because their schools refuse to consider gifted PLD worthy of funding. And over the past year, we have seen our enrolments drop abruptly by a staggering 80%. We believe from the feedback we have received that the primary cause of this very concerning drop has been schools' belief that the focus on underachievement rules out any obligation to worry about gifted students. Intensive efforts to involve schools following the award of a Ministry contract, including individually contacting CoL leaders throughout the country, offering a PLD package, offering a free status analysis to a trial group of schools and then to all schools to help identify their PLD needs, advertising and PR wherever we could obtain it and various forms of networking all failed to make a dent. At this stage, our numbers for the coming year for the online course are slightly up on what they have been this past year so perhaps we have turned a corner – but we are certainly not in a safe position as yet. The demise of this course and therefore of REACH remains a very real possibility. And clearly REACH is not alone in feeling the effects of this diminishing awareness of the needs – and the rights – of the country's gifted children.

[c] If that's where we're at and it's not where we ought to be, where did we go astray?

Given the hope that surrounded the Ministerial Working Party and the progress that appeared to be made at that time, why have we slipped back now?

There are two clearly identifiable factors which have played a part in this.

First of all, we have not solved the fundamental underlying problem, namely teacher lack of knowledge and therefore lack of awareness and understanding. It is still the case that the great majority of teachers at every level of schooling have received little or no pre- or in-service education in this field. It is still the case that educational psychologists, counsellors and RTLB don't have this subject embedded in their training. It is still the case that GATE coordinators can be appointed without any evidence of prior experience and without any PLD requirement having to be met. It is still the case that Group Special Education is not funded to carry out assessments, meaning that only those parents who can afford a private assessment can access such support for their children; all other parents must rely on the very uncertain ability of teachers to diagnose the presence of

giftedness. That situation in itself adds to the myth that gifted children are simply the children of affluent pushy parents, and can therefore be discounted. Until these basic and widespread misunderstandings are overcome, gifted students will continue to be our most neglected group of children and young people.

Secondly, unfortunately it has to be said that the Ministry itself has failed to provide leadership in this field. To what extent this reflects direction from the previous Minister and how this may change under a new Minister it is not possible for me to know nor appropriate for me to try to guess. But the fact remains that of the seven factors listed above as contributing to our failure to fully implement both the spirit and the practical recommendations of the Ministerial Working Party, all seven were under the aegis of the Ministry.

[d] *So how can we get back on track?*

In commenting on the findings of the Johnsen and Kaul study, I noted that all the obstacles to progress that they described were remediable obstacles, some achievable relatively quickly through policy changes and better resourcing, others requiring longer term attitudinal change, and thus dependent on sustained education in this field. Exactly the same is true here. Real, sustainable and system-wide progress in meeting the needs of gifted students will not be achieved until there is clear leadership and direction from the top – from the Ministry.

Looking at the other countries reviewed in the earlier part of this report, several demonstrated such strongly pro-active Ministry-level support, including Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt, Israel and Brazil. The US had its Jacob K. Javits programme, the UK had a programme aimed at gifted children in the inner city. If these countries can show such leadership, then assuredly Aotearoa-New Zealand can as well. Roger Moltzen, much travelled in gifted education internationally, has gone on record as saying that we have the knowledge and the skill in this country to do just as well as any other country on earth. The caveat: the need for this to be a Ministry-led initiative. Private providers, even universities, can do much to inform and educate, but cannot singlehandedly give direction to schools: that is the prerogative of the Ministry.

[e] *Where to start?*

Earlier I mentioned that there are two major approaches to gifted education, representing very different philosophies and goals.

One is focussed on “talent development”. Its leading proponent is the French Canadian, François Gagné whose work has been very influential internationally. Arguably one of his most valuable contributions is that, in drawing a distinction between giftedness as an inherent attribute and talent as that giftedness made manifest in performance in a specific talent area, he has highlighted the hugely important role of the intermediary “catalysts” – the factors which allow such giftedness to emerge and which support its development and maturation, including, of course, school and teachers. That is an important insight, whatever philosophical approach one takes. In choosing approaches, if our ultimate concern is with our country’s economic future, as in Egypt for example, then we might well conclude that Gagné’s focus on the end outcome of this process, successfully manifested talent, is the most appropriate one to take. But it’s an approach which can be very narrowly interpreted. In his most recent paper, published in 2015, Gagné has stated that he believes

we should abandon the word “gifted” altogether, and, further, that talent development should focus purely on academic talent. This is an extreme view, but it reveals the potential dangers of an approach which can all too readily concentrate only on measurable performance and achievement – the product rather than the child. Undeniably it is an approach which makes life easier for school administrators: assessment based on measurable performance is easier, quicker and cheaper than assessment using a qualitative approach, results in fewer students being identified and needing provision, and means that provision is more straightforward, and outcomes are more readily evaluated. But is it enough?

The alternative approach is the holistic “child-centred” approach which recognises first that *every* child brings to his or her education a unique set of inherent traits, prior emotional and social experiences and existing skills and abilities, and that meeting his or her educational needs involves understanding this “whole person” and responding accordingly. In relation to gifted children, the child-centred approach has as its basis the research demonstrating the way in which giftedness determines so much about how the child, from early infancy onwards, perceives and responds to whatever he or she experiences, and thus how it shapes the very different learning and social and emotional developmental needs such a child has in relation to age peers. Advocates of this approach also regard talent development as essential in the education of these children, but see it as one aspect rather than the sole purpose of that education, and argue that in fact talent is more securely and more fully developed within the holistic framework.

Which of these two approaches we decide should be the basis for our national approach is clearly a matter for discussion. However, as I have already acknowledged, I make no bones about saying that my personal belief, and the one on which we have based our REACH course, is the holistic child-centred approach. I do so because it is research-based, because it resonates with the experience I have had over some 30 years of working with scores of gifted children, their parents and their teachers, and, very significantly, because it aligns with the traditional beliefs at the core of our education system, so simply summed up by Fraser and Beeby, those two giants in our education history, as the right of every child to “an education of the kind for which he [or she] is best fitted and to the fullest extent of his [or her] powers”. Surely a mantra for every teacher in Aotearoa-New Zealand, and if somewhat obscured from view in recent years, then surely now due for refurbishment. Indeed, is that not fundamentally part of why we have had this focus on underachievement? So let us now apply it to gifted children and young people, dismissing for once and for all the misconceptions that have for so long denied these students access to the type of education for which they are “best fitted”.

But that’s a discussion which has to be held outside the pages of this report. So finally, whatever philosophy informs our policy-making, what practical measures might this review of gifted education globally and of our own history and present situation suggest?

[e] Steps to consider

{i} Leading from the front

As already noted but worth reiterating here, it is clear from the World Council reports and other information that gifted education is strongest and most effective where there is strong official

support from Government, Ministry or, in one case, the King. In those countries, officialdom has developed policy and a set of aims, actively supported PLD and funded a range of initiatives, from nation-wide competitions for students to national conferences and networks. Leadership from the top is demonstrably a crucial factor in achieving adequate provision for gifted children and young people.

In Aotearoa-New Zealand, while I readily acknowledge that there has been some Ministry support in recent times, such as the review of the tki website and the contract we ourselves were given, in all honesty it has to be said that there appears at present to be no high level coherent policy for this field, and that, as discussed earlier, has had serious repercussions for gifted students. If we are ever to make really significant progress, then the Ministry needs to accept responsibility for its important role in this process. It is encouraging that there are now signs that this may be considered, but consideration does need to translate into sustainable and relevant action.

{ii} *A small, simple but vitally important action*

Specifically, following on from above, there is a very urgent need to clear up the uncertainty surrounding schools' obligation to gifted students of all ages. NAG I [iii] has essentially been lost in the mists of history. Given the length of time that has elapsed since it was promulgated, the changes in school personnel including school management, and the many other developments there have been in education since that time, this is hardly surprising. Nonetheless, this is *a core principle* in our provision for gifted students. It needs to be officially and strongly reiterated. Surely the best vehicle for this would be via the Official Notices in the *Gazette*?

It is quite simply impossible to over-emphasise the crucial importance of this one simple step.

{iii} *How can we ensure implementation in practice of NAG I (iii)?*

This would seem to come down to three things:

- Inclusion of gifted provision in ERO school reviews
- Advisory support
- Access to quality PLD in this field to lift teacher knowledge and skill to an acceptable level

ERO produced a comprehensive report on gifted provision in New Zealand schools back in 2008, but that was a full decade ago. Currently there is a perception amongst those working in the gifted field that ERO now rarely takes this area into consideration in their school reviews – this was in fact the strongly voiced consensus of those attending a gifted conference in Wellington early last year. I've had an opportunity to meet with ERO to discuss this, and while they believe the teachers' perception is wrong, they have said they are going to review their reporting practices. That would be very helpful. Further, I do not know how the Ministry and ERO interact, but (a) if the Ministry gazettes an official notice reminding schools of their obligation to cater for the gifted, it would perhaps be helpful to draw this officially to ERO's attention, and (b) one of the ERO personnel attending my meeting with them was interested in the possibility of writing an update of their 2008 report: is there any way for the Ministry to encourage ERO to do this?

Advisory support is non-existent at present. I am unclear about the proposed expert partner role the Ministry is looking at developing and stand open to correction, but it does not seem to involve the

appointment of *fulltime specialists* who can concentrate solely on providing advisory support and who do not have other teacher or management responsibilities. Yet it is this kind of support from people with the depth of experience and expertise that only specialisation can provide that can be most helpful to schools struggling to know how to meet the requirements for identification, programme development, delivery, resourcing and evaluation that gifted provision involves.

Could consideration be given to reviving the advisory system? If so, then (a) physical territories need to be more realistically defined than previously, and (b) administration nationally needs to be uniform, not dependent on the policies of individual institutions, and therefore needs to come under the Ministry's jurisdiction.

Additionally, could encouragement be given to those responsible for the training of RTLB and SENCOs to ensure that gifted component is included in their training, using an experienced professional in the field to deliver this component?

Finally under this heading, improving access to quality *PLD* in this field is crucial. It is an aim which has more than one component, beginning with the next point and then dealt with more fully later.

{iv} Improving the accreditation process

The accreditation process should be rigorous, and in many ways, it was. But of necessity it was a fairly generalised process. Certainly applicants were required to state their area of specialisation and to give examples of their practice that would demonstrate their expertise. But the process did not seem to take fully into account the fact that those evaluating applications would also need either themselves to have in-depth expert knowledge of specific fields or to have access to someone who did. We certainly hit that block – it was glaringly obvious that the panel had no knowledge of the research surrounding gifted education. That is not a criticism of them as individuals, but it is a serious flaw in the panel design as it currently exists.

There are two ways in which this issue could be overcome.

Firstly, it should surely be possible to group applications according to specialisation and to ensure that there is an expert in each specialisation called in to advise on those applications. Desirable for the different curriculum areas, this is particularly necessary for special education in its various aspects, including gifted education.

Secondly, some thought might be given to establishing a set of subject specific criteria to help guide the accreditation team. There are existing examples of this, certainly in gifted education. For instance, the US National Association for Gifted Children has a detailed set of standards for teachers – I think that may have federal backing but would need to check. The Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted, Talented and Creative is another example of an institution which has such a set of standards. REACH also had to meet stringent criteria when it won endorsement from the Institute for the Study of Advanced development. All of that material can readily be made available, and there is undoubtedly more from other sources if we looked.

There are several school self-review documents which are available, but these do not have the detail or depth that would be required for accreditation purposes.

Finally, a critical point: these various provisos surely need to be clearly and firmly in place *before* accreditation is taken over by the Teachers' Council.

{v} Funding for gifted education

With the new Government promising funding for gifted education, there is an immediate need for a careful determining of priorities and of the conditions surrounding the award of funding. In particular there is a need to ensure funding has relevant and sustainable outcomes.

Thus it is essential that the same condition which applied to accreditation should also apply to the allocation of funding, namely that the decision-making panel includes one or more people with professional expertise in this field. This expertise needs to be called on, not only in setting criteria for allocation of funding, but also in setting the criteria for reporting back and evaluating outcomes. Whatever framework is constructed for this purpose needs to be meaningful and relevant – and also practical in design.

Then there are, I think we would probably all agree, four main areas in need of funding:

- Research
- Parent and whanau support
- Programme support
- PLD support

If we were to prioritise these areas, then PLD and parent/whanau support must come first. But let's look briefly at each area.

Research has been, and continues to be, instrumental in developing a better understanding of giftedness. Countries as widely different as Germany, Oman, Catalonia, the US and some of the Scandinavian countries have given government support to research: surely New Zealand should do the same.

- The giftEDnz association has worked to support research into giftedness in early childhood and into twice-exceptionality. It has also sought to provide workshop support for emerging researchers. The association having shown that it has the knowhow and the willingness to undertake such projects, it would seem deserving of the financial support which would increase and strengthen its ability to continue with and increase such valuable work.
- The NZCER has in the past shown interest in gifted education and could perhaps be encouraged to do so again.

Parent and whanau support has been limited for a very long time almost entirely to the support that can be provided through parent associations such as the NZAGC, its regional branches and one or two more local associations. These bodies do very valuable work in a range of ways, but one of their most significant functions is quite simply helping parents of gifted children realise they are not alone, that they're not being difficult or pushy or fanciful or elitist or any of the other labels so readily attached to the parent who diffidently raises the possibility that their child at school is capable of more challenging work. It is difficult for those who have not been in that position to comprehend how undermining and demoralising this experience can be.

That parent-to-parent support will always be needed, but there is at least one very important way in which the Ministry could also help, and that is to provide funding for assessments. Some gifted youngsters will always be readily identifiable by their schools, but until our teachers are universally better educated than they are now in diagnosing giftedness, there will continue to be a significant number – some experts say as many as half – who are not recognised by their schools. This inevitably includes gifted children from low-income families and from families living in rural areas, and these are exactly the families who because of cost or distance or both cannot access the cost of professional assessments. This is a very serious criticism of our present situation. We will not achieve a truly equitable system until we acknowledge this. Group Special Education should have funding for this purpose.

There can also be complexities associated with giftedness which require more detailed assessment than a teacher has the skills or the time to carry out, such as the diagnosis of twice-exceptionality or behavioural issues such as perfectionism, excessive anxiety or occasionally the presence or non-presence of other conditions such as ADHD. Some funding could justifiably be made available in these circumstances where parents cannot afford the heavy cost involved in assessment and counselling.

Lastly, support for the *families* of gifted Maori and Pasifika children is an issue which we have not really looked at as a country. The writings of people like Jill Bevan-Brown, Angus MacFarlane, Melinda Webber, Taemanuolo Faaea Semeatu and a growing number of others have started to open our Pakeha eyes to different cultural perceptions of giftedness, but how many of our mainstream schools turn to Maori or Pasifika elders for guidance on identifying and catering for the gifted children of those cultures? The valuable initiatives that are going on in relation to supporting Maori and Pasifika students need to include initiatives that identify and support in culturally appropriate ways those of these students who are gifted.

Programme support: This does not necessarily mean funding support for school programmes such as withdrawal groups or acceleration initiatives, though it is to be hoped that schools will be sufficiently resourced to provide such opportunities. These would also be strengthened if there is a re-introduction of advisory support and better PLD in this field for teachers in general. However, there are other possibilities worthy of consideration. Firstly, several of the countries reviewed had interesting officially-funded initiatives which could be used or adapted here. For example:

- Israel has a “Future Scientists Centre” mainly with a focus on science but including one which combines science with the humanities. More than 1000 students participate in these programmes. It is pioneering an “alumni community” of science professionals to influence and inspire future scientists.
- Israel also has a high school programme, in 2017 involving some 770 students who worked with local municipalities on local issues such as transportation.
- In Saudi Arabia, over 4000 students participate annually in an Olympics-style scientific creativity competition for projects in that field.
- Oman last year hosted the “Gulf Giftedness and Creativity Day” which included a “student activities fair” featuring student project work, creative works and other initiatives.

- The Mexican Alliance for Giftedness has set up a programme aimed at helping gifted students in rural areas, with around a hundred students so far identified. It too has held a Gifted Tournament with a focus on scientific competitions.
- Brazil celebrated 40 years of gifted education with a range of activities throughout the country, including events such as a competition to design a commemorative stamp, scientific and artistic exhibitions, and so on, involving in all some 1600 students and many teachers. An end of year event enabled students to exchange experiences, explain research projects, demonstrate prototypes, and display art works such as paintings, artworks, sculptures and published books.

Several of the ideas above could be followed up here, perhaps with the Ministry working in cooperation with the NZAGC and/or giftEDnz.

There are also at least three existing programmes in this country which might be considered for support:

[1] The *MindPlus* programme run by the New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education is a nationally-based programme combining the original One Day School and the Gifted Kids Programme. It survives only because of a sustained fund-raising programme.

[2] The newly formed *Gifted Academy* in Auckland is offering a full-time programme. It was only able to come into being because of a generous financial backer for its start-up process, but they too will need to seek other financial support, especially if the Academy is not to become a programme solely for the affluent.

I am not involved with either programme (apart from having given some surplus books to the Academy), but I know from my own involvement in teaching gifted groups over many years, including in the One Day School programme, that there is potentially life-changing benefit for the youngsters involved, in some cases literally life-saving benefit. Furthermore, there is very substantial international research to support the value of such grouping. What we don't have is in-depth New Zealand-based research into these programmes. I suggest there is a case firstly for funding independent local research which looked at both these programmes and evaluated their impact for students. The results of such research could be of value to schools considering grouping options such as pull-out programmes, full-time gifted classes, networking with other schools on shared programmes, and so on. Secondly, there is arguably a case for providing some scholarship funding for these programmes to ensure equity of access. If research confirms the value of either of these programmes, then consideration could perhaps be given to longer-term and more secure funding.

The third programme, and one of which we should be very proud as a country, is *Future Problem Solving* and its associate, *Community Problem Solving*. Initiated by former gifted and talented advisor Robyn Boswell, this programme has, year after year, had quite stunning success at the world FPS and CPS competitions, winning as many as nine top prizes including firsts when no other country won more than one or two. While not officially designed for gifted students, it's largely gifted students who are attracted to the underlying philosophy and to the realistic practical issues that are involved: conceptually, these are programmes of enormous value for the future adult life roles of our most able young people. I would strongly advocate for some funding support for this programme.

Last but definitely not least, provision for gifted students in rural areas is very difficult, given physical isolation and small numbers. Funding could support attendance at occasional specially organised camps and similar events. Funding could also support the NZCGE online programme for these students, or access to equivalent overseas programmes.

Professional Learning and Development

Of all the funding areas mentioned, this is the one which is absolutely the most fundamental and central to our future progress in this field.

In saying this I fully acknowledge that it might be seen as self-interest, since that's where my own work these days is entirely concentrated. The reverse is true. I chose to focus on PLD because I had long ago come to realise that while initiatives such as the George Parkyn Centre were valuable and perhaps essential steps in building gifted education, ultimately no real progress could be made until our teaching community had a basic understanding and acceptance of giftedness and its implications for the child's development and learning. I think I can say with some confidence that experienced colleagues in the field would entirely agree with that statement.

Yet as already noted, it continues to be the case that the great majority of teachers at all levels from early childhood through to high school have had little or no training in this field, either pre- or in-service, that there has been very little official funding allocated to this area, and that some of that funding has not, one can reasonably argue, been well managed. So what steps could be taken now?

First, let us reiterate the important proviso that any steps need to be supported by a very clear reminder from the Ministry to schools that catering for the gifted is a regulatory requirement.

Secondly and also vitally important, any significant funding should be allocated to PLD programmes which can demonstrate that they are based on the research into best practice in teacher education. And yes, that does include our REACH online programme along with the university papers, and I have no hesitation in saying that. One-off workshops do have their place and their value, but they do not constitute a systematic, mentored developmental process. Gifted PLD in this country has far too often been offered only in a disjointed and fragmentary way: that needs to change.

Thirdly, gifted provision in schools needs to have the backing of the school management. As noted earlier, we find about half of the teachers enrolling with us are paying their own course fees because their schools refuse to fund PLD in gifted education. How can those teachers expect to make a difference in their schools beyond their own classrooms when their management does not support them? We also quite often find teachers being appointed to take responsibility for gifted provision in their schools even though they have had neither training nor experience in this field. Excellent if they seek out our help – but how many are taking on this responsibility *without* seeking such training?

So some suggested PLD funding measures:

[1] First of all, as a necessary starting point, establish a list of courses or papers which meet the criteria for best practice in teacher education and which will therefore qualify for funding support.

[2] As an interim measure for three years to grow the numbers of skilled in-school professionals, provide a significant number of fully funded one-year scholarships for classroom teachers who are or

who are (confirmed by the school) about to become GATE coordinators in their schools, to allow them to complete one of the qualifying courses or papers. Ensure a proportion of those granted such support are teaching in rural areas or in schools in lower socio-economic areas. (What is a significant number? I would suggest a minimum of 200 over the three years).

[3] On an ongoing basis to continue growing in-school expertise, provide some *part*-funding for a specific number of teachers each year to complete one of the qualifying courses or papers.

[4] Learning from the Swiss example and also from some prior work done here, fund some specific training for management – a practical structure for this might be, for example, two two-day seminar-cum-workshops preceded by a school-based questionnaire and with practical tasks to be carried out in between: that would give a practical component directly relevant to each participant's school but would be reasonably compatible with the heavy time demands on all school management. Such a structure could also provide a basis for growing networks and could link into local CoL arrangements.

[5] Investigate funding training in the use of The World Game for a small group of educational psychologists who will then be able to train others. This has real promise for this country, given our existing bi-cultural situation and increasingly diverse multi-cultural population.

[6] Restore funding for gifted advisors, at least to what it was – the equivalent of 12 fulltime positions. Ensure appointment processes and administration of these roles are consistent across the country. Include funding for regular network meetings for all the advisors.

[7] Create a pool of funding which bodies such as giftEDnz, NZCGE, REACH, or any other such association could apply to for support with significant national or regional events, eg bringing an international expert to this country, running a national conference, organising a national competition or activity fair for gifted students, etc.

[9] Finally, the Ministerial Working Party recommended that every regional office should have someone who had local responsibility for gifted education. That has never been implemented, perhaps because of a dearth of people with sufficient basic knowledge to undertake such a role. Perhaps it is time to look at how more of the Ministry's own staff might be encouraged to grow their knowledge in this field.

SUMMARY

A review of gifted education globally reveals a diversity of concepts about giftedness, reflecting differing historical and cultural perspectives. Yet every nation seems to have recognised that amongst its children, there will be individuals who show ability in one way or another which is exceptional in comparison to their peers and who are different in their developmental patterns and needs. Amongst some peoples, this includes recognition of a spiritual element.

Countries have sought to provide for such difference in various ways, but two strong trends are either to focus very specifically on promoting the child's advanced development in his or her key talent area, or to take a wider more holistic approach, recognising inner needs as well as outer achievement or performance. It is noticeable that in those countries which have placed emphasis on the talent development approach, the focus is often quite narrowly directed towards what we now refer to as STEM subjects, with relatively little attention apparently being given to the humanities

and the arts. Sometimes, as in Egypt, it is openly acknowledged that this is because these students are seen as a source of future economic growth for the country. But also we do see provisions such as teacher workshops on creativity for disabled students, a student fair celebrating projects including art works and published books, and students working with local authorities on community projects.

One point which stands out very clearly is that gifted education appears to be strongest and most effective in those countries where there is high level official backing and support.

In this country, while there have always been individuals and groups which have sought to improve provision for gifted students, at a national level we have been largely remiss. We haven't embedded gifted education into our education system or into our national consciousness. We haven't provided adequate training for our teachers or for associated professionals like psychologists and counsellors. We haven't so far managed even to formulate a nationally embraced definition or concept of what giftedness is, leaving it to schools to invent their own despite the fact that we know they don't have the knowledge to do so.

In the early years of this century, all this seemed about to change, following the Ministerial Working Party and the initiatives launched as a result. It is fortunately true that one lasting outcome has been an increase in the number of teachers who recognise and try to provide for needs in this area. But they are still a minority, and much of that forward movement has slowed. Gifted students still do not receive adequate provision in far too many of our schools. Now, we have a new government, one which has promptly stated its intention to provide more funding for gifted education.

At last, we can hope, there is a chance to see gifted education have the recognition and support it needs if we are to cater for our gifted children and young people.

This review, it is hoped, has suggested many ideas, some drawn from the experience of other countries and some from our own experience and circumstances, which could constructively build a strong and effective gifted component for Aotearoa-New Zealand's education system.

The key determining factor now, it is strongly suggested, will be the willingness of the Ministry itself to provide the needed leadership in this field that alone will ensure school participation and support.

Rosemary Cathcart, January 2018

--oo0oo--

The following is a summary of the suggestions made in this report, in the hope that these will be accepted as a set of recommendations for Ministry consideration

- [1] Clear direction and leadership from the Ministry, beginning with officially reminding schools of their obligations under NAG 1 {iii}
- [2] Determining whether our national philosophy and basic goals for gifted education are to be talent-centred or child-centred
- [3] Re-establishing advisory support
- [4] Improving the accreditation process to ensure appropriate expertise guides accreditation decisions

cont.....

[5] Establishing a funding process which is also guided by appropriate expertise in setting its criteria for awarding funding and evaluating outcomes

[6] Setting priorities for funding, with the following being suggested in order of most immediate need: PLD, parent/whanau support, research support, programme support

- Parent/whanau support to include assessment costs; programme support to consider options explored by other countries and to include FPS and provision for gifted students in rural schools

[7] PLD funding to recognise the importance of management support and the need for PLD to reflect research on best practice in teacher education

- Specific measures to include:
 - establishing a list of courses or papers which meet the criteria for best practice in teacher education and which will therefore qualify for funding support.
 - across three years one-year scholarships for teachers acting as GATE coordinators to take one of the accepted papers or courses
 - part-funding for a specific number of teachers each year to take such a paper or course
 - funding for a seminar/workshop for school management
 - create a pool of funding to support significant national or regional events

--oo0oo--