

Editorial

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This special issue was co-edited with Kate Niederer and Lynda Garrett, who have given me the 'last word' as an editor of *APEX*.

Good things take time

This issue of *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education* is good – very good! It represents the culmination of nearly two decades of effort by the editors and editorial board members to create a journal that provides a strong evidence-base for gifted and talented education in New Zealand. Unlike previous issues of *APEX*, the articles featured in this special issue all report research findings from experienced, new and emerging researchers.

The importance of research to inform practice in New Zealand cannot be underestimated. Over a decade ago, my colleagues at Massey and I were granted the opportunity by the Ministry of Education to investigate provisions for gifted and talented students. One of our conclusions was the lack of research in the field, and a concern that even when research had been undertaken, it was often not accessible to teachers. I cannot express my delight in the growth of research since 2004, and *APEX* is the perfect vehicle for sharing the latest research findings with teachers, school leaders, professional development providers, educational psychologists, tertiary teachers and researchers.

These professionals are supported by giftEDnz: The Professional Association for Gifted Education who have helped make this issue of *APEX* possible through their biannual conference and Emerging Researchers' Special Interest Group. As the former Chairperson of giftEDnz, I am proud of the work of the Board and its members which is represented in this special conference issue. As a mentor to many of the authors of papers in this issue, I am thrilled to see their work 'in print' and I hope this is just the first of many publications under their names. My thanks to Lynda Garrett, as co-editor of this issue of *APEX* and as a member of the conference organising team, for her contribution to making this issue a reality. I would also like to acknowledge Louise Tapper and Janna Wardman who organised a very successful giftEDnz-sponsored writing retreat which enabled four of the articles in this issue to be more fully developed.

The collaboration between giftEDnz and the New Zealand Association for Gifted Children (NZAGC), who publish *APEX*, is an important one, marking the unique contribution of each group to the field of gifted education. This research-driven issue of *APEX* is a fitting tribute to an organisation celebrating 40 years of advocacy and support for gifted children, their parents and educators. As NZAGC moves in to the next 40 years, I am hopeful that the Board will build on and further develop the evidence-base that is represented in this seminal issue of *APEX*. I am grateful to my co-editor, Kate Niederer, for her work on this issue and hopeful that as the ongoing

editor and an Advisor to NZAGC, she will continue to lift the standards and profile of *APEX*, along with the editorial board members.

As an academic working in an aging workforce, I hear the word ‘swansong’ often, and, although I will continue as a teacher and researcher, as the co-editor of *APEX*, this issue is my swansong. I have had the privilege of working as the co-editor of *APEX* since 1997, first with Roger Moltzen and over the last two issues with Kate Niederer. Back in 1997, Roger and I had a vision for the journal as a peer reviewed, scholarly source of evidence from theory, practice and research to help us support and understand gifted and talented people. Over the years we have sometimes struggled to gather enough articles to produce an issue, as the track record clearly shows! As volunteer editors and board members, the work for this journal has been in addition to many other responsibilities, and, as a result, the many hours and systems needed to produce timely issues simply haven’t always been available, again, as the record shows. But we have persisted! And this issue of *APEX* – as my final edition as a co-editor – represents my ‘beautiful song’, a last effort before departing this role, and one which I am hopeful is just the first stanza.

Research to Inform Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand

This issue, thus, rightfully opens with a tribute to my longtime co-editor, colleague and friend, Professor Roger Moltzen. Roger was the recipient of the Te Manu Kotuku award, granted biannually by giftEDnz in recognition for service to the gifted education community in New Zealand. As the tribute explains, Roger is a deserving recipient of the award, and in this swansong he is a perfect opening line. Thank you, Roger, for your ongoing work and contributions to education.

The first article of this issue provides a synopsis of the research by Professor June Maker and her colleagues on her Real Engagement in Active Problem Solving (REAPS) model. June visited New Zealand in 2014 as the keynote speaker at the giftEDnz Inspired conference, and attendees will be interested in the extensive and growing body of research informing the REAPS framework for differentiated practice. As the article demonstrates, the model is comprehensive, flexible and valid – and it is one which aligns well with the principles and practices of gifted education in New Zealand. An invitation and challenge is presented to educators in our country to extend our understandings of content, process and product differentiation to all learners, including our gifted and talented students, in new and different ways.

In order to meet this challenge, we need to carefully consider teacher expectations. What do we expect of our gifted learners? In the next article, Lynda Garrett and her colleagues from the University of Auckland share the results of a 3-year study on teacher expectations, specifically in relation to gifted students. As the authors explain, while there is a large body of research on teacher expectations generally, our knowledge of teacher expectations of gifted students is limited. The authors’ research findings remind us of the importance of teacher accuracy in identifying gifted potential and achievement levels, which in turn, can *and should* inform appropriate, relevant and challenging provisions.

Similarly, teachers' conceptions of giftedness influence their teaching practices, as the next article demonstrates. University of Canterbury doctoral candidate Mel Wong reports the findings of a survey of early childhood educators which taps in to their conceptions of giftedness and twice-exceptionality and then relates those findings to their teaching practices. Mel's research has implications for teacher education, early childhood practice and further research – all of which are important for developing the potential of our youngest gifted children, an often overlooked and misunderstood group.

Another group of gifted learners who have sometimes experienced challenges are our gifted girls, but, as Eunice Price, a doctoral candidate from the University of Auckland and author of the next article, explains, their world has changed to one mediated by social media. 'Meet, Prey, Like' conjures up a great book of a similar title, and aptly summarises the lived experiences of Facebook for a group of gifted teenage girls. The article provides very useful and practical ideas for how teachers, and parents, too, can support gifted girls in their use of social media. I 'like' this article, and can relate to the tensions expressed by the teenage participants who expressed "desires to portray themselves as authentically as possible ... made difficult because of their peer group belonging needs (Meet); the expectations of those watching them (Prey); and their internal desires to be all things to all people (Like)."

Seeing the world through the eyes of learners is an important element of the next study reported in this issue. Massey University Masters of Education graduate, Sharon Mansfield, shares the results of her research investigating the experiences of children who are visual-spatial learners. Using photo elicitation to guide interviews with a group of visual-spatial learners, Sharon has used their experiences to help teachers understand the challenges – and privileges – of learning differently. One of the recommendations coming from this research is that teachers require "A shift in attitude away from the belief that all children learn the same way needs to be fostered." Sharon calls for provision of differentiation which takes into account an array of student differences.

One of the key student differences which educators need to understand amongst our gifted learners is the influence of culture – in both gifted behaviours, and our interpretations and responses to those behaviours. The next article by Dr Melinda Webber of the University of Auckland reports the findings of a recent study exploring the perspectives of Māori students, Māori whānau and teachers/school principals from eight secondary schools in the Rotorua area. Melinda shares the eight qualities of successful intelligence as conceptualised by these research participants, and "by virtue of their ability to adapt to, shape and interact with their environments in ways that are academically fruitful, socially acceptable and culturally grounded." This is

the first research of which I am aware that shares an iwi perspective – in this case, a Te Arawa world view – of giftedness.

Identifying and developing Māori potential is at the heart of the next article by Massey University graduate, Emma Scobie-Jennings. Emma has previously published her research in *APEX*, and in this second article, in a planned series of three, she begins to outline her school's efforts to put theory into practice as they identify and develop Māori potential. This article will appeal to practitioners and researchers alike, as it explains the development of practice from a strong base of evidence from research, practitioners, and students with their whanau. Bream Bay College will continue to be a school to watch, and I am looking forward to continuing to learn more about their work with Māori gifted students.

The final article in this issue encourages readers to 'get ignited' about acceleration. Based on a critical review of the literature, which included both research and policy documents, Dr Janna Wardman of the University of Auckland questions schools' use, or lack thereof, of acceleration, a practice she describes as enabling students to work at their ability level, rather than age. In this article, she shares national and international research, including some of her own work in this area, providing an argument for acceleration. This article will be very useful for schools looking for a good reason to accelerate – and it will challenge the myths and barriers of those schools administrators, teachers and parents who are against acceleration.

Concluding remarks

Congratulations and sincere thanks to the contributing authors, editors and editorial board members who worked to produce this issue of *APEX*. Thank you for your work towards this publication, but more importantly for your commitment to our future. The work you do each day to support New Zealand's gifted and talented learners, across all ages, cultures and areas of ability, as practitioners and researchers, makes a difference. It is a joy knowing each of you.