

Flying the flag in Prague

A number of New Zealand delegates travelled to the Czech capital, Prague, in August to attend the biennial conference of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children. They included Elaine Le Sueur, who was in Prague to promote New Zealand's successful bid to host the 2013 conference.

The conference in Prague drew delegates from more than 50 countries across the globe and featured a number of well-respected speakers, including Maureen Niehart, Franz Mönks, Dorothy Sisk, members of the World Council's executive committee and others. It was a great opportunity to put faces to names.

Earlier this year, Rosemary Cathcart and I heard that we had been successful in our bid for the next world conference, to be held in Auckland in 2013. In Prague, we were well supported by a small group of well-known names in Kiwi gifted education circles, who made their presence felt both as presenters and ambassadors for our country. Rosemary had prior commitments back home, but I undertook to complete the formal requirements with the executive of the World Council and to promote New Zealand as a fantastic conference and tourist destination, with the help of CINZ (Conventions and Incentives, New Zealand) and the marketing expertise of the Conference Company in Auckland.

The New Zealand PowerPoint/film clip exhibit proved a popular attraction and will be used by the World Council to promote New Zealand at other conferences over the next two years, leading up to Auckland 2013. My colleagues' presentations made my job of advocacy easier, because every time a New Zealander delivered a workshop or gave a presentation, it was followed shortly afterwards by an increase in the numbers of people visiting the booth and wanting to know more about us. Many thanks go to Tracy Riley, Kate Niederer, Rose Blackett, Robyn Harawira, Lisa Barlow, Sonia White, Lynn Berresford and Michelle Parsons-Simms (expat Kiwi) for their help, expertise and generosity with their time.

I am sure that our New Zealand booth must have been visited by all the delegates to the conference at some time over the five days, because we were a very busy hub in the exhibition hall. We were kept really busy fielding questions and we all became experts at:

- Changing or approximating centigrade to fahrenheit for climate comparisons, and converting New Zealand dollars to sterling, the US dollar and the euro (thank goodness for internet connections and the iPad!).
- Giving explanations about our geographical location and distances from a wide range of starting points. (This was an easier task than I had expected. Most international delegates were familiar with distances and travel times from their home locations to major airports such as Heathrow, Gatwick and Paris.)
- Networking with friends and colleagues from across the globe and making new connections.



Elaine Le Sueur pictured with Dr Taisir Subhi Yamin, President of the World Council.

It was wonderful to see and feel the enthusiasm and interest with which we were received. So many of the delegates in Prague indicated their intention to see us all again in Auckland in 2013. In fact, one delegate from Finland made a point of telling me that he had already been on the internet to book his air tickets, but was disappointed to find that no airline was prepared to take a definite booking so far ahead of time!

In addition to organising the New Zealand stand and promoting 'Down Under', I was invited to give a short presentation about New Zealand's Gifted Awareness Week. We were all delighted to hear that the World Council has committed itself to promoting an International Gifted Awareness slot at each of its conferences from now on, with an emphasis on sharing what is being done in other countries. Watch this space.

I am also very grateful for the assistance that the New Zealand representatives provided, allowing me to have a free day to sightsee in Prague while we were there. I made the most of the opportunity by taking a six-hour walking tour around the Old Town and making a fleeting trip through the more modern part of the city. I got back to the hotel with no feeling left in my feet, but thoroughly enamoured of this historical preserve, with cobblestones that millions have walked on before me. If only stones could talk!

My highlights included:

- The Lobkowicz Castle, with its wonderful view and the changing of the guard ceremony at midday
- The amazing medieval architecture and splendour of the churches



The astronomical clock in Prague.

- A sudden downpour on the Charles Bridge and the fact that it was so hot that I was completely dry again by the time I had walked to the other side, and the boat trip underneath it.
- The John Lennon wall (where I added my own tiny bit of graffiti, as a Beatles fan from way back)
- The hundreds and hundreds of stairs to go up and down (I lost count after the first 500)
- The amazing astronomical clock
- The wonderful friendly people
- The pet shop with a furry brown tarantula (the size of a bread and butter plate) for sale
- The need to make myself understood in shops where the only conversation was 'No English, sorry', but delivered with a smile.

I make no apologies for this list sounding like a travelogue. I didn't do the city justice in the time that I had. There are lots of places left to explore another time. Prague will stay on my bucket list as a place to revisit if I ever get the opportunity.

Our aim now is to make the New Zealand experience equally memorable and fulfilling for all who attend the conference at the Sky City Convention Centre in Auckland from 5-9 August, 2013. We have a wonderful opportunity to make a real difference for our able students over the next two years and to showcase gifted education in New Zealand to the world. The World Council and our local organising committee are looking forward to seeing you there! Bookmark this website today: www.worldgifted2013.com



Study shows teenagers' IQ can fluctuate

A new study has found that a teenager's IQ can rise or fall by as many as 20 points in just a few years, suggesting that it isn't as fixed as once thought. Researchers at University College London outlined their findings in *Nature*. They reported that during the teenage years, IQ shifts according to changes in particular brain areas and is also more susceptible to outside influences, such as tutoring or neglect.

The team's senior researcher, Dr Cathy Price, reported finding changes of up to 20 points – 'a huge difference'.

Dr Price and her colleagues at the university's Wellcome Trust Centre for Neuroimaging studied 33 healthy British teenagers whose IQ scores initially ranged from 80 to 140. They tested the volunteers on standardised intelligence exams in 2004 and again in 2008, to encompass the peak years of their adolescence, while monitoring subtle changes in brain structure using functional magnetic resonance imaging.

By analysing verbal and nonverbal IQ performance separately, the researchers discovered that these fundamental facets of intelligence could change markedly, even in cases where an overall composite IQ score remained relatively constant.

'One fifth of them jumped one way or the other,' Dr Price said. One teenager's verbal IQ score rose to 138 at age 17 from 120 at age 13, while her nonverbal IQ dropped to a below-average score of 85 from 103. Another's verbal IQ soared to 127 from 104 in four years, while his nonverbal performance stayed the same.

The rise or fall in verbal IQ scores appeared to be connected to changes in an area of the brain associated with speech, whereas shifts in nonverbal IQ related to an area involved in motor control and hand movements.

Dr Price said the study could have implications for adolescents' education, since it suggests that intellectual ability changes over time.

The team now wants to know what causes IQ drift: the rate of brain change, or educational factors that stimulate some skills but not others. They also want to determine if changes are teenage only or whether IQ can vary as dramatically in adults. In the meantime, researcher Sue Ramsden says: 'This [study is] encouraging to some whose intellect may improve, and a warning that early achievers may not maintain potential.'

Have you ever wanted to tell someone what it's really like being the parent of a gifted child?

Here's your chance! My study will ask you about the everyday experience of raising your child, your interactions with your child's school (or why you homeschool), your worries or concerns, and your support network. This study is about you. Speak up and have your say.

To participate, you must be the parent or caregiver of a cognitively gifted child who is undertaking a primary/elementary school curriculum. Homeschoolers and global responses are encouraged!

To find out more, visit www.parentsofgiftedchildren.com or contact Natalie at natalie.rimlinger@anu.edu.au (Ph. 00 61 2 6100 1305)