

Digging Deeper, Flying Higher

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Abstract

While celebrating the achievements in Gifted Education in New Zealand over the last 15 years, this presentation/paper also challenges participants to examine the progress made and build on this success in order to “fly higher” in the future. It briefly examines research-based issues and promising practices in: initial teacher education; professional learning and development; school and early childhood provisions for gifted learners; parental, family, whānau and gifted learner involvement and; Māori and multicultural matters. The presentation/paper ends with a challenge to consider wider social issues and their relevance to gifted education both in New Zealand and globally.

Celebrating the achievements in gifted education in New Zealand

Gifted education in NZ has much to celebrate. Notable landmarks have included the establishment in 1997 of the first National Advisory Committee for Gifted Education. This Committee has been disestablished and reestablished a number of times due to changes in the Government and Ministry of Education personnel. However its purpose has remained unchanged and this is to advise the Minister of Education on matters concerning gifted and talented education. Over the years this group has recommended many valuable initiatives in gifted education including the publication of *Gifted and Talented students: Meeting their needs in NZ schools* (2000), the gifted “bible” that has influenced provisions in many NZ schools. The combined experience and expertise of present Advisory Committee members is impressive so we can rest assured that the Minister and Ministry are continuing to receive well-informed advice.

Another landmark has been the establishment in 2001 of a National Working Party on Gifted Education. Their recommendations led to: our first national policy on gifted education; the National Administration Guidelines (NAG) change which requires all schools to show they are identifying and providing for gifted and talented students; and the establishment of 38 innovative Talent Development Initiatives over the 2003-2008 period.

Also deserving celebration is the establishment of **giftednz** - New Zealand's first national professional community in gifted and talented education whose brief includes improving the teaching and learning of gifted and talented learners through networking, sharing best practices, advocating for diverse needs, making links with international and national organisations, providing a shared voice to Government and other groups and, of course, running this present national conference. (<http://www.giftednz.org.nz/goals.html>)

Over the last 15 years we have seen an increase in research in the gifted area. Of particular note is the government funded national investigation of gifted education which resulted in the publication in 2004 of *The Extent, Nature and Effectiveness of Planned Approaches in*

Bevan-Brown, J. (2012). Digging deeper, flying higher. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 17(1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex

New Zealand Schools for Identifying and Providing for Gifted and Talented Students (Riley, et al) <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/5451>).

Since then we have seen an increase in student research in the gifted area with many exciting Masters and PhD theses now becoming available.

The establishment in 2000 of a “gifted and talented online” site on Te Kete Ipurangi (<http://gifted.tki.org.nz/>) has also contributed substantially to gifted education in NZ. The development of this site has continued over the years and it presently contains many excellent resources for educators, parents and gifted students themselves.

Finally, New Zealand now has a strong gifted community where educators, parents and organisations are combining forces and resources for the benefit of our gifted and talented learners – we definitely have a lot to celebrate and it is very important that we take the time to do so!

Digging deeper

However, we cannot rest on our laurels and must continually strive to improve the situation for gifted and talents learners in NZ, their parents, family and whānau. We are challenged not just to increase the breadth of our provisions for gifted students but also to take a deeper look, to put a microscope on the progress we have made to see how we can build on it. We should not accept improvements at face value but must scratch below the surface and take a critical look at the progress made. For example, more Māori students are now involved in gifted programmes than ever before, this is wonderful, a cause to celebrate! **But** what are these programmes like? If they do not take account of the students’ culture then the reason to celebrate is mitigated and we still have work to do.

Presentation/paper structure

This presentation/paper examines four specific areas: initial teacher education and on-going professional learning and development (PLD); early childhood and school provisions for gifted learners; the involvement of parents, families, whānau and gifted learners themselves and; Māori and multicultural matters. In each area causes for celebration are briefly mentioned, challenging questions posed, and two “basic” requirements and a “hot topic” are discussed.

1. Initial Teacher Education and On-going Professional Learning and Development

Over the past 15 years institutions involved in initial teacher education have increased and improved their gifted education offerings. Nowadays a variety of relevant stand alone, compulsory and elective courses are being offered at the undergraduate and post-graduate level and gifted content is increasingly being integrated into general curriculum papers. Similarly, a wide and interesting range of PLD courses in gifted education are being offered. For example, the Ministry of Education has recently contracted Te Toi Tupu to provide Gifted and Talented PLD in English-medium schools (Y1-13) in the North Island for the 2012-2013 period. This PLD is entitled “*Helping Gifted Learners Soar: Kia Rewa ki Runga*” and is

Bevan-Brown, J. (2012). Digging deeper, flying higher. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 17(1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex

“designed to raise the achievement of all gifted learners, with a particular focus on gifted Māori and Pasifika students, gifted students with special education needs, gifted students who are underachieving in the regular school system and gifted students from low socioeconomic backgrounds” (<http://gifted.tki.org.nz/What-s-new/Past-news-items/Gifted-and-Talented-Education-PLD>)

Despite these improvements, we need to ask ourselves: Do **all** teacher trainees graduate with the competencies needed to teach gifted students? Is PLD accessible to everyone who needs it? Are all initial teacher education and PLD courses high quality, multicultural and relevant to the needs of today’s gifted students? Do these courses cover all levels of the education system including early childhood?

Compulsory gifted content in initial teacher education that addresses both skills and attitudes
Both common sense and a plethora of research evidence tell us that when teachers are well prepared to teach gifted students the greater the success their students experience. Well prepared teachers are better able to identify gifted students, more sensitive to their needs, use evidence-based effective strategies to meet these needs and provide more opportunities for gifted students to develop their talents and experience success (Robinson, Shore & Enersen, 2007).

While there is considerable debate about the best means of preparing teacher trainees and qualified teachers to teach gifted learners, research identifies a need for compulsory courses that challenge participants’ beliefs about giftedness and gifted learners and include positive practicum experiences. Research also shows that, generally, there is very little change in university students’ beliefs over the course of their instruction (ibid). Consequently, if we do nothing to counteract common beliefs such as ‘gifted children will succeed regardless of the quality of teaching they receive,’ we are doing a major disservice to these teacher trainees and the gifted students they will encounter in their future careers.

The powerful influence of attitudes is also evident in research involving teachers. A study by Brighton (2003) showed that from a group of teachers who took part in intensive PLD over three years (this included coaching sessions, demonstration lessons and direct instruction,) those who were most successful in putting their newly learned skills into practice were teachers who had prior positive attitudes towards addressing diverse academic needs.

While challenging and changing attitudes is a vital ingredient in initial teacher education and PLD, providing the skills and tools to teach gifted students is a corequisite. It is not enough to believe in the importance of differentiating the curriculum to accommodate all learners, you must also have the skills and means to do so!

Relevant, active, needs-based learning

People learn better when material is perceived as relevant, they have input into determining their learning goals and are actively engaged in the learning process. These components are incorporated into a successful PLD approach that utilizes Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDP). As opposed to attending a one-size fits all PLD session, teachers are helped to identify their particular learning needs and design a PLD plan that enables them to meet these needs. This detailed plan includes learning activities; how, when and

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where they will be done; and an evaluation of their effectiveness. IPDPs can be developed in conjunction with others and may include activities such as peer coaching, school visits, expert consultation and so forth. PLD is not seen as a one-time event but rather a continuing process based on the needs of the teacher and the gifted students they teach (Karne & Shaunessy, 2004).

A similar approach is being used in the Post-Graduate Diploma (Specialist Teaching) endorsed in gifted education offered by Massey University and coordinated by Associate Professor, Tracy Riley. Students are provided with a set of competencies for teachers of gifted and talented learners and a mass of material in each competency area. They are required to set their own learning goals related to each competency and then select, complete and reflect on learning activities to achieve these goals. These learning 'artifacts' are then presented in an e-portfolio. This approach is used in both the Theory and Foundations Gifted Education paper and in the associated practicum paper. A similar on-line PDL course funded by the Florida Department of Education and evaluated by their Office of Research and Evaluation was found to be both relevant and effective (<http://www.unfwogi.com/>).

Hot topic- Technology

Have you noticed that apart from a fashion accessory, young people these days don't wear watches? When Ken Robinson asked his teenage daughter if she would like a watch for her birthday she looked astounded asking "Why? It only has one function!" (Robinson, 2006). Ken did argue that he would buy her one that showed the date as well but the point is, why would she want a watch when her telephone could tell her the time in any place in the world, could text, take and send photos, act as a diary, note-taker, stop watch, pedometer, give her access to the world wide web, play games, translate languages and provide a myriad of other functions? This is the world our gifted children live and operate in, a world in which many of their parents and teachers are struggling to catch up!

Initial teacher education and PLD must teach teachers how to use today's ever-unfolding technologies in the education of gifted students. Webquests, virtual field trips, interactive maps (Google Earth), webliography (TrackStar), video pods, desktop publishing, simulations and so forth are the teaching tools of the 21st Century. The internet has become **the** vehicle for gifted curricular differentiation (Sheffield, 2007). It provides opportunities for gifted students to: work with others of like mind; be electronically mentored; gain a sense of belonging; work at their own pace and; take control of their own learning. They can produce authentic products using software that enables them to compose music, design buildings, collect and analyse laboratory data and work on solutions for real world problems. They can be virtually transported to the world's top museums and art galleries (Ng & Nicholas, 2007). The challenge is for us to produce teachers and other educational professionals who can maximize this technology to benefit gifted and talented learners.

2. Early Childhood and School Provisions for Gifted Learners

Previously mentioned landmarks in gifted education in NZ have all contributed to significant improvements in the education of gifted and talented learners. Compared to 15 years ago we have more gifted programmes, services, policies and resources and there is a much greater awareness of gifted education and associated issues. New and innovative programmes have been introduced throughout the country many of which are being shared

Bevan-Brown, J. (2012). Digging deeper, flying higher. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 17(1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex

at this [giftednz](http://giftednz.org.nz) conference. Others are described in various publications on the tki gifted site (<http://gifted.tki.org.nz/>) - so we have much to celebrate!

In preparing this presentation/paper I found it difficult to select just two basic requirements and a hot topic under this heading as the area and research relating to it is so extensive. I finally made my choice from research initiated by the Javits Gifted and Talented Students' Programme funded by the US Department of Education. A steering group of practitioners and academics was convened to identify research-supported practices of greatest interest to practitioners. After a multilayered process, 29 individual evidence-based practices were identified. These all met the criteria of being grounded in empirical research and offering particular guidance to educators, parents and policymakers about what works with gifted and talented students. The findings are published in a very readable book – *Best Practices in Gifted Education. An evidence-based Guide* by Robinson, Shore and Enersen (2007). Of the 29 practices listed I have chosen two to discuss

Early literacy experiences for precocious readers.

Precocious readers tend to have favourite books that they ask to have read to them over and over again. It is through these early storybook experiences that they teach themselves to read. Subsequently, the children who are read to by their parents from an early age score higher on measures of reading readiness and independent reading. If children's early encounters with reading are enjoyable, they are motivated to read more frequently and widely in later years (Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007).

How can teachers assist these precocious readers? Research shows that to maximize progress these readers need instruction and material that will challenge them. In fact a study by Burns et al. (1991) showed that if precocious readers are not challenged their achievement scores can regress to the same as their more average peers. Contrary to this finding, Stainthorp and Hughes (2004) found that at age 11 precocious readers had maintained their advantage but that their school experiences had not actually contributed to this. These gifted children had progressed in spite of their teachers and not because of them!

Having already mastered much of the curriculum before entering school, precocious readers test teachers' ability to provide a differentiated education. Chall,(2000) found that when teachers had students with widely varying abilities they tended to give precocious readers 'enrichment' material on the same grade level instead of the challenging material and instruction that would accelerate their progress. While these are all American studies, we need to ask ourselves, would we find the same thing in NZ schools? Are precocious readers being given enrichment material and then left to their own devices? Their peers receive reading instruction commensurate with their level of ability, is this the case precocious readers?

Acceleration

Acceleration is one of the most researched and cost-effective best practices in gifted education. People tend to think of acceleration as skipping a class or two but there are many other forms of acceleration, for example: early entrance to primary and secondary school, subject acceleration, telescoping curriculum, ability grouping across grade levels, fast-paced extra curricula classes, dual enrolment in university classes while still at college, and early

Bevan-Brown, J. (2012). Digging deeper, flying higher. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 17(1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex

entrance to university. In fact Colangelo, Assouline and Gross (2004) mention 18 different types of acceleration. These authors conducted an in depth study of acceleration and found that research overwhelmingly supported its benefits. However their research also showed that acceleration was infrequently used in the USA. Why was this so? They listed six reasons:

- “Limited familiarity with the research on acceleration,
- Philosophy that children must be kept with their age group,
- Belief that acceleration hurries children out of childhood,
- Fear that acceleration hurts children socially,
- Political concerns about equity,
- Worry that other children will be offended if one child is accelerated” (2004, p.53)

According to Colangelo, Assouline and Gross these reasons are not supported by research. In 2004 they launched a national campaign to raise public awareness about the benefits and underuse of acceleration distributing 1000s of free copies of their report “*A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students?*” both in the USA and internationally. In a personal email (28/3/12) Nicholas Colangelo reported that the awareness-raising campaign has been successful with a number of States developing state-level policies on acceleration and some even passing Acceleration Bills. The results of a survey assessing the impact of ‘A Nation Deceived’ at year 3 can be found at <http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Research/IRPAsResearch.aspx>.

While research cited in Robinson, Shore and Enerson (2007) supported the academic benefits of acceleration, it was noted that there was still insufficient research on the social and emotional affects of acceleration. Despite this, increased use of acceleration was advocated and schools urged to develop policies and procedures to guide teachers in the use of acceleration.

Riley et al’s (2004) investigation of gifted education in New Zealand showed that acceleration was not widely used at that time. It is likely that its use has increased over the intervening years but it is also likely that acceleration as a means of providing for gifted learners is still underutilized. I wonder how many of our early childhood centres and schools have evidence-based policies on acceleration that provide guidance to teachers and parents? My challenge to NZ teachers is to make much greater use of the 18 different types of acceleration!

Hot Topic - Creativity

From the outset I would like to acknowledge that most of the ideas in this section of my presentation/paper are from a TED talk delivered in 2006 by Sir Ken Robinson. The talk is entitled “Do our public schools kill creativity?” and it is well worth listening to (<http://life-engineering.com/1747/do-public-schools-kill-creativity/>)

Sir Ken Robinson explains how the present school system was intentionally developed to accommodate the needs of industrialism with the most ‘useful’ subjects being placed at the top. He maintains that every education system on the earth has the same hierarchy of subjects: at the top are mathematics and languages, next come the humanities, and at the bottom are the arts. The arts have a hierarchy of their own with art and music at the top and drama and dance at the bottom. As a result of this prioritizing of subjects, academic ability

Bevan-Brown, J. (2012). Digging deeper, flying higher. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 17(1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex

has come to dominate our view of intelligence. "As children grow up we begin to educate them from the waste up. And then we focus on their heads, and slightly to one side." (Robinson, 2006)

The consequence of this educational history is that creativity is viewed as the poor relation. Robinson maintains that the education system is squandering children's creativity and that many highly talented, brilliant, creative people undervalue themselves because their abilities were not recognized or valued at school. In some cases they were actually stigmatized because of their creativity. To illustrate his point Robinson relates the story of Gillian Lynn – the choreographer responsible for *Cats* and the *Phantom of the Opera*. At school in the 30s Lynn was considered to have a learning disorder because of her inability to sit still. Aged 8 she was taken to a specialist for an assessment. After answering many questions, Lynn's mother was guided out of the room by the specialist who turned on the radio as he left. "When they got out of the room, he said, 'just watch her.' Soon as they left, she was on her feet, moving to the music. He said to her mother, 'Mrs Lynn, Gillian isn't sick, she's a dancer, take her to a dance school'". (Robinson, 2006)

Fortunately, Mrs Lynn followed the specialist's advice and as a result Gillian went on to dance for the Royal Ballet, founded her own company, teamed up with Andrew Lloyd Weber, and their productions have given pleasure to people worldwide. A less astute specialist might have put Gillian on Ritalin and told her to calm down!

Robinson gives a very strong message that we need to knock down the present subject hierarchy and give equal status to all subjects. "Creativity now is as important in education, as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status" (Robinson, 2006). Creativity, however, is not limited to the arts, we also need creative scientists, mathematicians, writers, and so forth but how do we develop creativity in all these areas? Robinson would answer that we need to foster and extend children's innate and extensive creative capacity, their ability to take a chance, to innovate. He illustrates this point with the story of a little girl engrossed in her art lesson. When her teacher asks what she is drawing, she answers "God." "But nobody knows what God looks like," says the teacher. Unfazed the little girl replies, "Well they will in a minute!"

Robinson maintains that children will give things a go because they are not frightened of being wrong. By the time they are adults, however, most children have lost this capacity because we are educating them **out** of their creative capacities. We are teaching them to look for the one right answer instead of encouraging experimentation, creativity and learning from mistakes. Picasso is credited with having said that "if you're not prepared to be wrong, you will never come up with anything original." With today's rapidly advancing technology, how can we educate children for the future when we have no idea what that future holds? If we nurture children's creative capacity instead of squashing it, they will not only survive in the future, they will actually determine its path.

In New Zealand there are many exciting, innovative programmes where students' creativity is recognised and developed. Perfect examples are the future problem-solving and community problem solving programmes led by Robin Boswell and her colleagues, science and technology challenges, music and kapa haka festivals, and the creative use of Renzulli's

Bevan-Brown, J. (2012). Digging deeper, flying higher. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 17(1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex

school-wide enrichment model in many New Zealand classrooms. However, in digging deeper we need to ask ourselves what type of thinking is generally tested in our national exams and rewarded in our education system? Are we guilty of educating children **out** of their creative capacities as Robinson suggests? Interdisciplinary ways of working spark creativity - is this encouraged in NZ or are we firmly fixed in our subject silos? Do we have a subject hierarchy in gifted education?

3. Involvement of Parents, Families, Whānau and the Gifted Learners Themselves

We have made steady progress in this area over the last 15 years. Achievements to celebrate are the publication of the Ministry-funded book for parents *“Nurturing Gifted and Talented Children. A Parent-Teacher Partnership”* (2008) and the development of areas for parents, families/whānau and gifted students on the TKI website. These sites contain a wealth of information about giftedness, relevant websites, competitions, career opportunities and scholarship information. The New Zealand Association for Gifted Children (NZAGC) has also continued to do wonderful work for gifted children, their parents, families and whānau. Their website (<http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/>) provides wonderful helpful information including an on-line forum for parents. Regional branches organise events such as club days, speakers, parent evenings and other activities where gifted children and their parents can find support, friendship, motivation and inspiration.

However, while we do well at providing information at this organisational level, how well do we do at the chalk face? How welcome do parents, family and whānau feel at their local school or early childhood centre? What power do they have in decision-making regarding their gifted children? What genuine input do gifted students have in their own education? How often do we consult with them and, when they do speak out, do we **really** listen to what they are saying, especially if it is something that we don't agree with or that makes us feel uncomfortable?

Listen to parents and build strong, positive parent-teacher relationships

There is substantial research showing that parents are very accurate in identifying their children's gifted abilities and also research that supports the benefits of early identification of gifted children (Robinson, Shore & Enersen, 2007). Consequently it is important that we consult with parents as early as possible and take notice of what they say.

Similarly, there is substantial research evidence showing that involving parents and families in their child's education leads to successful outcomes for the child (ibid), so building a strong, positive parent-teacher partnership must be a high priority. The gifted literature contains many suggestions about how teachers can contribute towards building this relationship, for example: holding information evenings about the nature and needs of gifted children; workshops on how to promote giftedness at home; guest speakers; information pamphlets listing local resources, activities and useful websites; involving parents as volunteers; having a lending library and so forth.

Provide a supportive, stimulating home environment

Parents have a powerful influence on their gifted children's development so providing strong support, stimulation and encouraging exploration of their talents is an important

Bevan-Brown, J. (2012). Digging deeper, flying higher. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 17(1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex

responsibility. This does not mean rushing off and enrolling gifted children in countless extension classes, coaching sessions, extra tutoring and the like. While these activities provide excellent extension and enrichment opportunities for gifted children, research shows that even more helpful are supportive parental attitudes and quality time spent with their children - talking, listening, reading, playing, showing interest in their education, doing daily activities and investigating topics of interest with them. Research by VanTassel-Baska (1989) and Tomlinson et al. (1997) with economically disadvantaged gifted children and gifted children from minority groups shows that this message is true across cultures, socioeconomic situations, parental IQ and levels of education. It will be a relief to many parents to learn that they need not be rich, white, nuclear physicists in order to develop their child's gifted potential. However, they do need to provide them with plenty of affection, time, guidance, support, and shared learning opportunities. (Bevan-Brown & Taylor, 2008).

Hot topic - listening to gifted and talented learners

Worldwide, gifted adolescents are disproportionately represented amongst those who commit suicide. This is a tragic statistic that we cannot ignore. Because of their advanced abilities and heightened sensitivities gifted learners can feel socially and emotionally isolated to such an extent that life is no longer worth living. What can we do about this? One answer is that we need to encourage gifted learners to talk about their emotions and **really** start listening to them.

Dr. Mark Goulston is a world renown clinical psychiatrist and communication expert who trains FBI and police hostage negotiators. He is author of an international best selling book entitled, *Just Listen. Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone.* (2009). In an interview with Michael Shaughnessy, SENG Editor. Goulston noted that most people listen to others through a filter that causes them to assume they understand, know where the other person is coming from and what is best for them. Parents and teachers of gifted children are no exception. They listen believing they know what is best for these children, when in fact they may not. Goulston suggests that the "best approach is to accept that more often than not we are listening through a filter and jumping to the wrong conclusions." To counter this, we need to discipline ourselves to "ask more questions, listen with an open mind and assume less." (Shaughnessy, 2010, unpagged).

Goulston recommends using a number of listening techniques including the empathy jolt, the hmmm technique, power thank yous and power apologies. A description of these techniques and how to use them can be found at <http://www.sengifted.org/archives/articles/an-interview-with-dr-mark-goulston-listening-to-gifted-children-and-adolescents>.

4. Māori and Multicultural Matters

In the early 1990s I approached the Department of Education and the Department of Māori Affairs for funding assistance to research gifted Māori students. The response that I received from both Departments was one of complete puzzlement – "Why would I want to research this topic when there were so many more important areas that needed investigation?" Things have changed, thankfully, and nowadays gifted research contracts, PLD programmes, curriculum documents, education policies and so forth all have a Māori component. There is

Bevan-Brown, J. (2012). Digging deeper, flying higher. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 17(1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex

also more awareness of: Māori concepts of giftedness; the need to use culturally appropriate identification measures and methods; and to provide culturally responsive programmes and services – these are all improvements we need to celebrate. However, as stated previously, we cannot rest on our laurels as there are still many Māori and multicultural improvements that need to be made. To help you identify areas to focus on, I recommend you go to <http://gifted.tki.org.nz/For-schools-and-teachers/Cultural-considerations/Māori-students/Toolbox> and complete the questionnaire, “How well is your school [early childhood centre] providing for gifted students from minority cultures, 25 questions for you to consider” (Bevan-Brown, 2012). Celebrate the areas of strength and develop and implement a plan to rectify any weaknesses identified.

Raising expectations of Māori and Pasifika students.

Research over many years has shown that children will perform up (or down) to expectations. This is known as the pygmalion effect (see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion_effect). Many teachers do not expect to find giftedness amongst Māori children. As a teacher commented to Rosemary Cathcart (1994, p. 184) “Gifted kids? You won’t find any of those kids here. All our little faces are brown.” That was way back in 1994, surely we have improved since then? In general we have but deficit thinking is still alive and well in some areas. For example, one Māori parent who was concerned about her son’s progress in reading told me that when she expressed this concern to his teacher she was told not to worry because “he was doing quite well for a Māori child.” It should be noted, however, that this issue of raising expectations of Māori and Pasifika learners is not confined to teachers and other educational professionals. Māori and Pasifika parents and whānau and the community at large must also expect Māori and Pasifika learners to achieve and excel.

Focus on gifted Pasifika children and children from ethnic minority groups

The education of gifted Pasifika children and those from ethnic minority groups is an area calling out for attention. We are in desperate need of research to inform practice and targeted provisions for these learners.

Table 1 shows the official projections for our NZ population in 2026. The figures indicate that in 14 years time the European population will have decreased by 7%, Māori will have increased by 1%, the Pasifika increase will be 3%, while the Asian population is projected to have the largest relative growth, increasing by 6%. This means that in 2026 the combined Pasifika and Asian population will make up 26% of NZ’s total population. The projection for people of ‘other’ ethnicities is not given. At present they make up less than 1 percent of our population, but since 1991 they have grown in number faster than any of the major ethnic groups. These statistics highlight the urgent need for action in respect to gifted learners from Pasifika and other ethnic minority groups.

Bevan-Brown, J. (2012). Digging deeper, flying higher. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 17(1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex

Table 1: New Zealand Population Projections for 2026

Ethnicity	Population Today (%)	Projected Population 2026 (%)
European	77	70
Māori	15	16
Asian	10	16
Pasifika	7	10

NB: This information is sourced from Statistics New Zealand website (<http://www.stats.govt.nz>). The percentages totaling 100+ are a result of people identifying with more than one ethnic group.

Hot Topic - Gifted Māori/Samoan/Somali... achieving success as Māori/Samoan/Somali...

Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success is the Māori Education Strategy for 2008 – 2012. Its underlying intent is ‘Māori enjoying education success as Māori.’ This is to be realized through four broad learner outcomes. They are:

- Māori learners working with others to determine successful learning and education pathways;
- Māori learners excel and successfully realise their cultural distinctiveness and potential;
- Māori learners successfully participating in and contributing to te Ao Māori;
- Māori learners gaining the universal skills and knowledge needed to successfully participate in and contribute to Aotearoa New Zealand and the world.

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PolicyAndStrategy/KaHikitia.aspxand>

Applied to gifted education this means that:

- the responsibility for achieving success for gifted Māori students rests with everyone. It is not just about about Māori or Pākehā, it’s both. Similarly, it is not just about Korean or Pākehā, it’s both. All gifted education-related decisions that affect Māori/Samoan/Somali... students must have Māori/Samoan/Somali... input. This is not just the “do you agree with this idea we have come up with?” type of consultation but the “what should we do?” pooling of ideas approach – a truly equal partnership;
- developing a Māori learner’s gifts must not be at the expense of their culture rather their culture should be an integral part of their development. This means that culturally appropriate measures must be used to identify a Māori concept of giftedness and developed by culturally appropriate means, where the content and

context is Māori-relevant. The same principle applies to other ethnic minority groups;

- **all** gifts and talents valued by Māori and other ethnic minority groups must be identified and developed, **all** are important not just those that align with western concepts of giftedness or those that can be easily identified and developed. At this stage I would like to rectify a misconception that has arisen about the Māori concept of giftedness I identified in my research many years ago (Bevan-Brown, 1993). I have heard people say that, according to Bevan-Brown, academic ability is not as important for Māori as some other areas of giftedness. I believe this has arisen because a chart from my research shows intellectual ability as being only number 5 in a list of 10 areas of giftedness. These areas were listed according to 'frequency of mention' in the data collected and this has been erroneously equated with a ranking of importance. This is akin to saying that at Massey University psychology is more important than aviation because more students choose to study psychology than aviation. In fact regardless of the enrolment numbers both subjects are important. Similarly, regardless of the number of times particular areas of giftedness were mentioned, all are important and all should be identified and developed;
- cultural knowledge, skills, qualities and values must be applied in a 21st century context. As a Māori friend of mine said, "if we just think of our culture in terms of traditional knowledge being applied only in traditional ways, we are on the wrong waka!" Similarly, in a retirement speech (26/6/12), Sir Mason Durie warned that "Maori must learn from the past but not live in the past."

Finally, I would like to briefly mention some wider social issues and their relevance to gifted education both in New Zealand and globally. One hundred and fifty years ago, in *The Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens wrote:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness..."

Dickens could have been writing this for 2012. We live in the most technologically advanced age, science breakthroughs can, potentially, have us living to 100+years old. There is great prosperity, knowledge is doubling at an exponential rate and the opportunities we have are limitless – we are in the best of times. But we also have widespread poverty and hunger, nations are fighting each other, racial and religious intolerance abound, global warming is having devastating effects, in fact some people maintain that we are slowly killing our earth, we are certainly killing each other – so we are in the worst of times.

Gifted children, arguably, have the greatest potential to make the best times better and the worst times worse. Consequently, in gifted education we have a great burden of responsibility. The challenge is not only to develop our gifted children's intellectual and creative abilities but also their sense of responsibility, their tolerance and caring for each other and the environment so that their inventions, policies and practices lead us away from the brink of earth's destruction rather than hastening our journey towards it. We must start giving as much attention to children's intrapersonal and interpersonal development as we do to their cognitive development.

Bevan-Brown, J. (2012). Digging deeper, flying higher. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 17(1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex

Renzulli (2002) talks about expanding definitions of giftedness to include “co-cognitive conditions” such as courage and sensitivity to human concerns. We have already done this in NZ with our Māori concept of giftedness. Renzulli also talks about the importance of service learning initiatives: again the service component is an integral part of a Māori concept of giftedness. I believe we have the potential to lead the world in this area in fact, the success of our future problem-solving teams overseas indicates that we are already doing this - my challenge to everyone is to build on this success. Let’s dig deeper so that not only will gifted education in NZ fly higher but we can also provide an example for the rest of the world to follow.

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