Giftedness: Some New Zealand Perspectives

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The strong egalitarian temper of New Zealand society—a product of historical, geographical, and economic factors—is reflected in education administration by the policy of making education freely available. Education, as a right, has long been prized by its citizens, and few other countries have achieved a closer approximation to equality of educational opportunity than has New Zealand.

Free and secular education is provided in some 2,000 state primary and 300 secondary schools. Compulsory education begins at age six and terminates at 15; however, the majority of children begin school on their fifth birthday and continue through to age 16. In addition, many have had one or two years of pre-school experience before beginning their formal education. And, increasingly, more academically able students stay on in secondary school for an additional year before entering tertiary educational institutions.

Development of Concern for the Gifted in New Zealand Education, 1940-1989

The history of gifted and talented education in New Zealand is largely that of the commitment and effort of concerned individuals. The impact of the scholarly writings of Parkyn in the 1940s on educational provisions for the intellectually gifted has been considerable and served as an excellent foundation for what followed in later years.

The 1950s saw heightened interest and activity concerning the gifted at both national and district levels, with New Zealand educators drawing heavily on overseas—principally American—models and experience.

These educational endeavors gained momentum during the following decade. To some extent, this flurry of activity was partly a ripple effect from the post-Sputnik panic in the United States, and partly an outcome of interest in the re-discovered phenomenon of creativity which attracted considerable attention among New Zealand educators. The 1960s was notable for the publication of two influential reports on the gifted. A ministerial commission (the Currie Commission) was conducted during this time and, in its broad overview of the state of the nation’s education, considered the provisions for the gifted in New Zealand schools. But, despite the promising beginnings, the decade ended with gifted education in near oblivion.

Something of a resurgence in concern for the welfare of gifted children occurred in the early 1970s. The Department of Education, somewhat belatedly, published a handbook which encapsulated much of the thinking of the previous decade. The handbook was significant for several reasons, the major one being that it represented a consolidation of several decades of policymaking. At long last, teachers could discern what the approved and officially sanctioned provision for these children should be. But the effects, if any, were not revealed in a marked improvement nationally in the lot of gifted children. The basic pattern remained essentially the same as before; the nurture of the gifted was undertaken largely by enthusiastic and dedicated educators working...
About New Zealand

AREA: 103,883 sq mi (269,057 sq km).
POPULATION: 3.3 million.
ETHNIC GROUPS: European, 81%; Maori, 13%; other Polynesian, 3%.
RELIGION: Anglican, 24%; Presbyterian, 18%; Roman Catholic, 15%.
LANGUAGE: English. LITERACY: 99%.
MAJOR CITIES: Auckland, 820,700; Wellington (capital), 325,700; Christchurch, 299,400.

One of the last lands on earth to be inhabited by man, New Zealand was settled by seagoing Polynesians perhaps 1,000 years before Dutchman Abel Tasman arrived in 1642.
Later, Captain James Cook claimed it for Britain and marveled at the islands' many indigenous species, which included a flightless bird called the kiwi -- now a nickname for citizens. Despite their historical role as sheep farmers, 84 percent of today's Kiwis live in urban-suburban areas; one in seven is Polynesian.

Source: National Geographic, 171 (5) May 1987, 663.

at the local level, frequently in apathetic, and occasionally antagonistic, circumstances.

The mid-1970s saw a dramatic upsurge of concern for the gifted child in New Zealand through the fortuitous juxtaposition of two occurrences — and the resultant media coverage. The first of these was the World Conference on Gifted Children in London in 1975, and, concomitantly, successful attempts were made to establish associations for gifted children in New Zealand's three major cities. These associations, modeled on the NAGC in Britain, found an enthusiastic following and substantial public support.

In the late 1970s, new initiatives were taken: the time was ripe for a joint parental/professional/community liaison to make greater efforts to ensure that the gifted would receive the type of education they warranted.

However, although there had been obvious advances made on a broad front during the decade — with some apparently very successful local innovations — there could be no room for complacency. There was still a great deal to be accomplished.

The Challenge of the 1980s: Some Contemporary Issues

Identification has been a recurrent theme throughout the New Zealand literature on giftedness. Several prominent educators have provided helpful guidelines and advice over a span of three decades. They have consistently advocated employing a broad concept of giftedness, the use of multiple criteria and techniques, and a team approach involving teachers, parents, peers, and psychologists to assist in the search for exceptional children. Yet, the majority of teachers (and others) have tended to limit themselves to a consideration of intellectual giftedness, excluding other forms of giftedness and talent, and to the use of a single criterion, most commonly an IQ, for the purposes of identification. While it is appreciated that this narrow, conservative view is by no means peculiar to New Zealand, it may be worth pondering how long it will take — and what further efforts will be required — to modify the firmly established concept of giftedness as primarily an intellectual ability and to permit the notion of non-intellectual giftedness to gain long-overdue acceptance.

Heavy stress on early identification is evident in the national literature, and such identification places considerable responsibility upon junior high schools teachers who may — or, may not — be appropriately trained for the task. Skillful teachers at this level can, and do, employ sensitive and searching techniques to elicit the signs of exceptionality associated with giftedness and outstanding performance.

Since nearly every New Zealand teacher has responsibility for identifying gifted children; and, given the uneven standard in this respect, one becomes concerned with omission rather than
with commission. Once a teacher feels he or she may have an exceptionally able child in the class, the typical procedure is (1) to refer the child to the school principal, who may then (2) refer him or her to the local branch of the Department of Education's School Psychological Service where a thoroughly professional and comprehensive assessment is made. Psychologists at the Service play a vital role not only in the identification of gifted children, but also in the dissemination of information about them, in the learning and teaching strategies they suggest to classroom teachers, in lecturing at inservice training courses, and in making policy suggestions in the Department.

Equality of Educational Opportunity

Any concept of giftedness in education can be seen only in a context of time and place. The background of the early pioneers in New Zealand, with their British cultural traditions, and the subsequent growth of a distinctive social and political philosophy towards a so-called "egalitarian" state which incorporated an implicit doctrine of equality of educational opportunity, are central to the contemporary scene. Regrettably, this doctrine has been interpreted frequently to mean "the same for all" or "similarity of treatment" and, to some extent, this misguided view still hampers the development of appropriate educational provisions for New Zealand's gifted. A more valid interpretation of the doctrine, and one that has far-reaching implications for the education of the gifted and talented, is that of "equal as fitting."

In the case of the gifted, considerable responsibility is placed on educators to indicate a valid syndrome of exceptionality that can be associated with the concept. And, any claims for different treatment of these children must rest on the reality of such differences. While, in theory, such lofty ideals cater for exceptionality and include the gifted and talented in their provisions, all too often, in practice, special provisions are made for all exceptional groups except the gifted and talented. In this, and other respects, gifted and talented children have become one of the most disadvantaged groups in New Zealand education today.

Prevailing Attitudes Toward the Gifted

One of the major aims of the Third World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children in 1979 was "to create a climate of acceptance of the gifted." A decade later, cultivating such a climate remains of chief concern in New Zealand. Some gifted children are fortunate to be in schools where teachers are making sincere attempts to translate, into action, the philosophy of "every child being valuable in his or her own right," and where an effort is made to afford opportunities to allow such children to develop their full potential in a stimulating and supportive educational environment.

However, far too many gifted children are finding their school experience boring, dull, lacking in challenge — and even humiliating. Concern must be expressed as to the extent of the intellectual and emotional damage being caused unwittingly to these children (often unrecognized) as they spend years in unsympathetic and unresponsive school settings, their educational and human needs unmet.

In extreme cases, the educational setting may be downright hostile to the gifted, many of whom learn to hide their giftedness in an effort to make their school life tolerable. Obviously, drastic changes in prevailing social practices and attitudes are needed if New Zealand is to realize the tremendous contribution that the gifted and talented can make to society.

Gifted: Definition of the Term

Essentially, the ideas about and the diversity of definitions of giftedness mentioned in the literature since the early part of this century have been available to educators in New Zealand. The rise and fall in popularity of particular concepts and definitions has followed the general pattern for most western countries.
Today, we have an array of definitions. Children with special abilities (CWSAs) is the "official" term used by most Department of Education officers, and the definition is sufficiently vague and broad to include most varieties of talent. Many teachers and principals, however, still think primarily in terms of superior intelligence and/or a very high level of academic achievement, although they would also acknowledge special talent in art, music, and sports, with, perhaps, a bland acceptance of "creativity."

However, those in the vanguard in New Zealand gifted education have emphasized that giftedness, however defined, is a matter of degree. Relevant attributes are distributed on continua, and the interaction among these attributes is extraordinarily complex and constantly changing. In the years ahead, it is anticipated that the concept of giftedness for New Zealanders will likely become multidimensional, embracing the nonacademic/humanistic and the academic/utilitarian traits across multicultural planes. These are small, yet encouraging signs of a rethinking; a redefining which, it is fervently hoped, will move both professional educators and lay people away from the earlier cramping concept of giftedness, which has dominated for much too long.

Educational Provisions

After definition, and resultant identification, the vitally important issue is the quality of education. It does not matter if years are spent arguing about who the gifted are — and in experimenting with identification programs — if little of consequence is done as a result. In the long term, it is the excellence of the educational enterprise that is crucial to any child, whatever the child's ability.

Segregation. Gifted children in New Zealand receive most of their formal education in the normal classroom. While there have been examples of special teaching programs provided for short periods — either during school hours (opportunity clubs) or, more often, out of school hours (museum classes, explorers clubs) — most formal teaching of the gifted and talented continues to take place in the course of everyday classroom teaching. Provision is essentially in-school and in-class, and official Department of Education policy endorses integration, rather than segregation.

An aversion to any kind of segregation for the gifted was seen in the 1950s, and rather extreme views were held at that time. As far as the intellectually gifted were concerned, opinion, on the surface, has moderated little during the intervening period. With New Zealand's dispersed population, it is obviously impractical to segregate the gifted in special schools, except, perhaps, in the three major cities. Yet, in terms of educational facilities for the gifted within the schools, it is possible to point to various administrative organizations which permit the most able students to be identified and grouped despite the prevailing climate of non-streaming. Whether this grouping constitutes segregation is a moot point: there appears to be a very fine distinction between "segregation" and other, more neutral or positively loaded, grouping labels.

New Zealand schools also display a curious kind of double standard in regard to segregation. While decrying the withdrawal, separation, or special treatment of intellectually able children, which, it is commonly feared, might be to the detriment of other students, no such barriers appear to operate at the other extreme of the ability continuum. The most able athletes (gymnasts, rugby and netball players, swimmers), dancers, singers, musicians, actors and actresses are identified, segregated, and given intensive coaching or tuition, at least for some time during the school week. Competition is often fierce, and selection, after a trial, audition, or series of elimination heats, confers status and special privileges. New Zealand teachers and the public generally find little wrong with such blatant selection, segregation, and special treatment in these areas of giftedness or talent. Indeed, such talents are highly valued and painstakingly nurtured. Yet, for some strange reason, the selection of students
on the basis of intellectual ability — and any special provision made for them — invariably stimulates antagonism and charges of elitism.

It has not been claimed by those New Zealand educators interested in the gifted that such children must be in special classes, nor, for that matter, that there must be special classes for the deaf, the retarded, the physically handicapped, or the emotionally disturbed. In fact, it is well known that there are, at the present time, numerous valid arguments being voiced for integrating such children in the normal classroom — mainstreaming — and that mainstreaming is now being practiced as Departmental policy. What is being suggested is that the needs of the gifted child be met fundamentally — and not administered in tiny doses either at particular times during the school day, or as an extracurricular activity after school, or at specially organized weekend classes.

Enrichment and Acceleration. If gifted children are to receive their education in the normal classroom taught by the regular teacher, what sort of diet are they to receive? Is the decision to “let them eat cake”? It would seem so from most of the literature on enrichment and acceleration. Probably more nonsense has been written in New Zealand, and elsewhere, about these terms than about anything else to do with the gifted, and it strikes at the very core of education — the quality of teaching.

Enrichment is the popular catch-phrase for almost any educational provision for the gifted. It is a word with positive connotations, and it is safe educationally. Even the most rabid egalitarians concede a little enrichment for the gifted is tolerable because of the favorable spinoff effect for the average child.

Nearly all of the special programs for gifted children in New Zealand have claimed to be engaged in enrichment. Some of these, as has been noted, are conducted outside regular school hours. Where classes have been held within school hours, they have been restricted for fear of antagonizing teaching colleagues, or of drawing the tag “elitist” because of the “special treatment” received. The basic notion is that enrichment classes provide opportunity to study, in some depth, subjects that are not available within the curricular pattern and organization of the school. Yet, if this is the case, one is inclined to ask: How should the other teaching that the gifted receive during the rest of the time in school be described?

Enrichment, for most New Zealand teachers, means any modification of class instruction that provides greater challenge and involves teaching the students how to learn and study independently. But, in practice, it very often becomes “more of the same” — a quantitative increase of work on the usual level. All too frequently, enrichment programs tend to be tacked on, ad hoc, temporary projects of momentary special interest which are fragmentary in nature, with no real connection to the curriculum. Nothing precedes these programs, and nothing logically follows. It is by resorting to this kind of enrichment “ provision” that most New Zealand teachers have been — and still are — catering for the perceived needs of the gifted.

Acceleration has met with few attempts at definition in the New Zealand context, but it is equated most often with the idea of skipping classes (grades). Exaggerated drawbacks of the effects of acceleration abound; many teachers, and some Departmental officers, believe that social and emotional maladjustments will inevitably result from gifted children’s placement with others who are older chronologically. It is commonly thought that while intellectual interests and activities may be shared, the gifted cannot participate as equals in activities of a social or physical nature; some will be emotionally immature. This is a gross overgeneralization, particularly when it is recognized that for many gifted children their intellectual, social, and emotional peers are those who are older!

One of the few New Zealand writers who
displayed a better understanding of these issues was Hill, who commented, "Acceleration of a kind must occur in any scheme for it is impossible to range wider and deeper intensively without going on in many senses as well. Let us avoid the tyranny of breadth of learning. The importance of breadth for balance is accepted. Yet this can easily lead to a diminished 'altitude in ability!'"

Similarly, the New Zealand Department of Education showed awareness of the problem when it stated, "Few programs enrich horizontally without leading vertically into the higher levels. The consequence of better provisions for the bright has been a recognition of the need for acceleration." That view is still held. Despite official sanction for at least some acceleration, it is little utilized in New Zealand schools. Where the practice is employed, it is too often used insensitively and without accompanying enrichment programs or student counseling; resulting merely in more of the same sooner, and occasionally, with distressing personal outcomes for some of the students involved.

Teachers and Teacher Training

Since gifted children in New Zealand are taught by the usual teacher in the regular classroom, the quality of teaching and teacher training is of critical importance. If the classroom teacher is not predisposed towards identifying gifted children, what chance is there of catering for their special needs?

The sensitivity and competency of New Zealand teachers in these directions are diverse. It is fair to state that the majority of New Zealand's teaching force is unable to cope adequately with the range of abilities found in the heterogeneous, unstreamed classes which are currently in vogue. They are insufficiently trained to teach children with special needs at the extremes of the ability continuum. It is equally obvious that there is an alarming national shortage of teachers who are intellectually and temperamentally fitted to teaching gifted students, although there are identifiable historical reasons for it.

Some of the six New Zealand teachers colleges offer courses in teaching pupils with special abilities and/or in areas of exceptionality, including the gifted. However, the majority are optional courses and, due to time constraints, are severely limited in both scope and content. The number of trainees taking such options is not large and hundreds leave college with little notion of how to identify, stimulate, and extend the gifted children they will undoubtedly meet when they take charge of their first classes. Almost without exception, the colleges would all like to do more in this area if specialist staffing were available. But, clearly, at the present time there is an urgent need for all teachers in training to learn about the needs of gifted students and know how best to nurture their special talents.

Fortunately, teacher training in relation to the gifted is not confined solely to the teachers colleges. National and local inservice training courses are conducted at irregular intervals. But, because of the nature of the selection process involved, the teacher audiences reached are somewhat restricted; in a sense, the course tutors preach to the converted.

University education departments also include the "gifted" as one aspect of exceptionality in courses dealing with the atypical child. A relatively recent innovation is a Massey University course — which can be taken extramurally — devoted exclusively to the study of education of the gifted and talented. More such courses are desperately required and would provide much needed input for practicing teachers who not only recognize their deficiencies in this area but are motivated to improve their knowledge and competencies in teaching the gifted.

Curricular Adaptation and Special Programs for the Gifted

While some useful suggestions for teaching the gifted and talented across a number of curricular
areas have appeared in a variety of Department of Education publications, all are now in urgent need of updating to incorporate recent developments and changed emphases in the field of giftedness. In most of the programs advocated in these handbooks, stress is placed on the importance of individual pupil research and reporting, the development of independent learning through the use of reference materials, and the development of divergent, as well as convergent thinking skills. However, the treatments are tantalizingly brief and yield little new information for the teacher who is already offering challenging experiences to children.

How far can the regular New Zealand school syllabus be considered an adequate basis for curriculum modification? Freeman, an influential Departmental inspector, claims that it is versatile in this respect. The responsibility, however, rests with the classroom teacher to design and determine the qualitative differences required of a program to suit the needs of gifted children, and their ability to conceive and develop such modified programs from a general syllabus. Freeman, too, admits that problems arise for a teacher who has not received adequate training in working with gifted children and warns that unless teacher training in this field of exceptionality is improved and becomes more widespread, the advantage of the syllabus cannot be fully exploited.

In discussing differentiated curricula, another problem with such an approach is that modifications can be little more than spasmodic episodes of teaching — lacking the well-conceived foundation so necessary for quality differentiated programs for the gifted. In fact, such programs require the concerted efforts of curriculum designers, teachers, and specialists involved in the education of the gifted and talented. They should reflect a consistently high quality of ideas and activities over time — not just over a month or two, now and again. It is unrealistic to expect the average New Zealand teacher, alone and unaided, to be a competent planner of differentiated programs for the gifted.

While there has been partial success in reinstating special programs for the gifted, there is neither a consistent pattern nor a groundswell of opinion that would lead one to predict confidently that the gifted are making a comeback that would rival the remarkable post-Sputnik days, when experimental programs were actively encouraged by the Department of Education. Today, there are other more immediate and more pressing concerns for both schools and nation which are likely to impinge on the education of the gifted.

Resources

In the prevailing and projected bleak economic climate in New Zealand, it is highly improbable that governmental spending on education will increase markedly. Even if it should, priority will almost certainly be given to more critical and politically sensitive areas — assessment in the senior secondary school, mainstreaming, bicultural education — before improved education for the gifted. So, while an ideal situation would allow for additional assistance to be made available to schools — extra appropriately trained teachers, more support staff, a staffing ratio which would allow for more one-to-one or small-group teaching — it is unlikely that the schools can expect any increased governmental financial input to provide more adequately for gifted students.

Further, the drastic administrative and other changes outlined in Tomorrow’s Schools, scheduled for implementation in October 1989, make the future even more uncertain for all education professionals.

As a first priority, then, teachers must make the best of existing resources both within and outside the school. Optimum use must be made of teacher abilities and strengths in meeting the needs of the gifted; something that is being done already in a limited way in some of New Zealand's larger and better-organized schools. In many small towns and throughout the rural areas, however, it may mean a much greater degree of coordination and cooperation among schools and
staff so that especially talented teachers and gifted children can be brought together at a convenient central location for part of the school week, at least.

Increasingly, the typical New Zealand school is being viewed as a restrictive environment for gifted children. No one school has all the resources; no team of teachers possesses the knowledge, skills, and capabilities to cater for the very diverse abilities of these exceptional children. As a consequence, resources outside the school must be utilized to a far greater extent, and here the family and the community have much to offer. There exists a rich, untapped resource in terms of human talent in New Zealand society. While the notion of community involvement and the use of mentors are considered by most to have merit, not a great deal has yet been accomplished. Those who have made the effort, by and large, have found it worthwhile.12

Looking to the Future: The 1990s

In considering the many issues relating to the education of the gifted and talented in New Zealand in the decade ahead, there are ten problems of paramount importance which require swift resolution:

1. The Department of Education, as the central administrative authority, must determine and state clearly a national policy for the education of gifted children. It must decide whether giftedness is to be classed as one kind of special education, or whether it is to be viewed simply as an individual difference to be dealt with on a personal basis. If it is the latter, as is more likely, then given appropriate consideration of individual differences, the needs of the gifted could be met adequately. Present accomplishments, however, fall far short of the ideal.

As a result of two national conferences mounted by the Department of Education in 1985, involving a range of knowledgeable people working in the field of gifted and talented education, a comprehensive set of recommendations was forwarded to the then Director General of Education. Their final report13 included:

- a definition of children with special abilities to be used nationally;
- a statement of principles, policy and implications, both for the Department of Education and teachers; and
- recommendations on organization and administration, teacher training, school and staff development, identification and programming, research and evaluation, and the relationship among schools, community, and parents with regard to children with special abilities.

As with any educational issue, concern for the gifted is bound up with society's values. New Zealanders must decide, firstly, whether they value excellence in education. If they do, then they must be willing to translate the values associated with producing excellence into tangible assistance, both in terms of money and personnel. Secondly, New Zealanders must be prepared to examine critically the philosophy of equality of educational opportunity and to decide whether the doctrine has become distorted so as to promote mediocrity, rather than that intended by New Zealand's pioneer educators: to ensure the maximum growth of individual abilities and the optimum development of human potential.

Concerted moves must be made to broaden the New Zealand educator's current idea of giftedness. It must be expanded to accommodate the entire range and diversity of human talents; to break free of the dominance of intellectual aspects, encapsulated for many in the IQ metric. If a broadened definition receives general acceptance, then teachers will
be considering both utilitarian/academic/intellectual and humanistic/nonacademic/creative (multitalented) ideas of giftedness in their identification procedures.

4 Identification of giftedness should be preceded by the kind of education which makes its manifestation possible. Identification should involve multiple methods to the extent that records are kept which are interpretable by those who follow in the system, and it should also be continuous through to the tertiary level. All these matters pertaining to accurate identification and monitoring of the gifted in the New Zealand school system require urgent attention.

5 A vastly more interesting and intellectually challenging education — with the opportunity to explore ideas and to be creative in a stimulating and supportive school environment — must be provided. The curriculum for the gifted child should not be some “beefed-up” version of the common core, nor should his or her classwork be characterized by isolated doses of “busy” or project work, euphemistically termed “enrichment.”

Since the New Zealand Department of Education endorses a policy of integration, whereby gifted children receive most of their formal education in the ordinary classroom, it becomes mandatory for the successful implementation of such a policy of non-segregation that it be supported by enlightened, well-trained, and empathic teachers. Every classroom teacher will be a teacher of at least one gifted child, yet the present preparation and inservice training are woefully inadequate to equip them to meet the challenge.

7 Significant changes are required in both school and classroom administrative practices and organization to meet the needs of the gifted:

- There must be more flexibility: children working out of class and out of school where appropriate; more individualized and small, study-type programs; non-graded programs; flexible promotion practices; less rigid timetabling, particularly in the secondary schools; university credit for advanced secondary school courses and/or gifted children being given the opportunity of attending university classes (not generally permitted at the present time); gifted pupils working alongside a professional in the community for part of the day, and similar provisions. Whether or not such changes will be more readily accomplished under the new administrative structure projected for the entire New Zealand school system remains to be seen.

- More consideration should be given to teams of teachers, supported by paraprofessional and community resource personnel, working cooperatively with groups of gifted children on a regular basis. It is imperative that the concept of the “one teacher in one classroom for one year” approach be modified drastically. The first and last responsibility for educating the gifted should not rest within the classroom!

- Where flexible approaches are developed to meet the diverse needs of the gifted, a far better job must be done of monitoring the programs and evaluating the outcomes. That something constructive is being done and that everybody involved appears to be enjoying the experience — will not suffice.

There is an obvious necessity for the coordination of efforts in providing learning experiences for gifted pupils being made by different people and in various ways. It is apparent that there is general ignorance of what others are doing in different parts of the country. Experiences must be shared to avoid repetition of expensive failures, in terms of time, money, and morale.

National oversight is lacking. Recommendations for the appointment of a Departmental National Adviser, made over the past 30 years
from organizers of local and national inservice courses and from various committees that have studied the education of the gifted, have fallen on deaf "official" ears. The need is no less urgent today than it has been in past decades. It was voiced yet again in the proceedings of the 1985 high-level national conferences on gifted and talented, but, typically, no action has been taken.

Similarly, dissemination of information on the gifted is either inadequate or nonexistent. New Zealand publications are rare. Mention has been made of the few Department of Education and Psychological Service booklets or pamphlets available, all of which are in urgent need of updating and revision. The major associations for gifted children produce newsletters of varying quality, but are written primarily for parents. The New Zealand Council for Educational Research distributes copies of relevant research articles, reviews, reports, and the like, to these associations for gifted children on an irregular basis and has recently compiled a computerized bibliography of all New Zealand literature on gifted and talented from 1940 onwards. In 1987, Apex, a New Zealand educational journal for teachers and parents of gifted and talented children, was launched and is still being published twice yearly. Two resource centers for teachers — one in Auckland, the other in Wellington — designed to assist teachers provide for children with special abilities, have been a recent innovation and welcomed by those professionals with access to them. Apart from these activities, there is very little informational input. It may take years for reports of overseas developments or information on local programs to reach teachers and others, primarily those outside university centers, who have urgent need of it.

New Zealand. Apart from a handful of thesis studies conducted by students for advanced university degrees, virtually nothing has been undertaken by New Zealand researchers in recent years. While there have been numerous requests and recommendations from various interested parties for investigations to be mounted on aspects of giftedness and the education of the gifted, appropriate funding has not been forthcoming. Currently, there is a pressing need for relevant, well-conceived, applied research on almost every facet of gifted education.

Finally, two sizable groups are underrepresented in the ranks of the gifted both in New Zealand and worldwide.

- First, too little attention is paid to gifted girls, particularly at the upper secondary and tertiary levels. Recently, Munro has cited five issues which must be addressed in the New Zealand context if gifted females are to realize their potential.

- Secondly, educators have insufficient knowledge of the socially and culturally disadvantaged to ascertain whether gifted children from such backgrounds are being identified. Indeed, it is rather arrogantly assumed that culturally different groups possess the same narrow concepts of giftedness as the dominant, middle-class culture, i.e., intellectual/academic ability (and, perhaps, creativity). The importance of New Zealand's multicultural setting, and the recognition of different ideas, interests, values, and abilities of gifted and talented children from minority cultures have been spelled out by Walford and Reid. And, while the failure to tap the vast pool of talent among the socially and/or culturally different in New Zealand is generally acknowledged, no research has been undertaken to discover the magnitude of the problem, much less to suggest ways and means of solving it. Educators simply stumble ahead in ignorance.
Conclusion

Obviously, it is imperative for the relevant central and regional New Zealand education authorities — and all those professionals and non-professionals involved in nurturing the gifted — to take cognizance of the important issues identified above, and to respond by collaborating to forge, and subsequently implement, a comprehensive and progressive policy for educating New Zealand’s many gifted and talented students in the remaining years taking us into the 21st century.

FOOTNOTES


7 New Zealand Department of Education, op. cit., see Footnote 5.


15 Munro, J. “Underachievement among gifted females” in Apex, 2 (1), 1988, 33-34.


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