



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

GIFTEDNESS IN NZ EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES

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BACKGROUND

- International research shows gifted children need additional educational support in order to avoid underachievement and realise their potential, and to stimulate motivation to learn
- Identification is a necessary first step
- No NZ research and behavioural indicators for early years and overseas research may not be appropriate for NZ sociocultural context

Objectives of research

- Devise a NZ-appropriate identification tool to assist teachers to support learning and development of gifted young children
- Analyse teachers' perceptions of the impact of identification on programme provision for gifted young children

Concepts of giftedness

- Multicategorical and sensitivity to multicultural values
- A set of skills and abilities exhibited as gifted behaviours influenced by culture, language and environment

Definition

Harrison (1995, P.19)

A gifted child is one who performs or who has the ability to perform at a level significantly beyond his or her chronologically aged peers and whose unique abilities and characteristics require special provisions and social and emotional support from the family, community and educational context



 THE PRINCIPLES
 THE STRANDS

Te Whaariki and the Gifted

- Starting point is “the learner and the knowledge, skills and attitudes that the child brings to their experiences” (p.9)
- Roedell (1989) “Educators (need to) start concentrating on each child’s abilities and the immediate developmental need for special programming that these might engender. Four-year-olds who have known all the colours since they were 18 months old, who read at the third-grade level, and who have the vocabulary of an 8-year-old obviously need something different from the usual preschool or kindergarten curriculum. It makes sense to identify and meet those needs. It doesn’t really matter how the child developed these advanced abilities – whether it was early teaching, early experience, genetic endowment, or whatever. What matters is that the child’s existing level of competence should be matched by appropriate educational experience” (p.16-17)

Identification for Programme Provision

- Ensure gifted behaviours are matched to challenging curricula opportunities, resulting in a “learning environment (that) enable(s) children to set and pursue their own goals” (MoE, 1996, p30)
- Ensure programme provides opportunities for demonstration of gifted behaviours
- Open-ended, self-selected, challenging, responsive environment in which teachers, children and parents are seen as learning partners (ie reflects the principles and strands of *Te Whaariki*)
- Credit-based, multi-voiced, meaningful and relevant (sociocultural) observation

- The process of assessment and evaluation called for by *Te Whaariki* is encompassed within the principles included in Wilks' (1993) recommendations. These were that assessment be worthwhile (benefit the child), integrated, holistic, systematic, incorporate self-assessment (child perspective), a variety of approaches, be ecological, include parents, and used to promote learning (pp. 125-127). The process is supported by the concept of authentic assessment (Grenot-scheyer, Schwartz & Meyer, 1997; Puckett & Black, 1994). This is defined as:
- the process of observing, recording, and otherwise documenting the work that children do and how they do it as a basis for educational decisions that affect those children . . . it assigns priority to the needs and accomplishments of the individual learner. (Puckett and Black, 1994, p. 22)
- Authentic assessment calls for informal strategies which are nevertheless reliable and valid through being “teacher mediated, child centred, embedded in the curriculum, ongoing and cumulative, and based on multiple theories of human growth and development” (Puckett & Black, 1994, p. 174).

Te Whaariki: Assessment

- a continuing process, involving careful observation, identification of needs and capabilities, provision of resources, assessment, and evaluation . . . planning will usually begin from observations of the children's interests, strengths, needs and behaviours. . . . Assessment of children's learning and development will be part of the information needed to evaluate the programme. . . . It is essential that assessment and evaluation are based on the goals of each strand of the curriculum and that the principles of the curriculum are always applied. (p. 28 - 29)

Devising the Tool

- Reviewing the literature on indicators of gifted behaviour in young children:
 - Very small body of empirical studies, especially for areas other than intellectual giftedness
 - Uneven coverage and methodologies
 - Development and testing of checklists in association with gifted programmes for young children, based on available research and parent and teacher observation
 - Mostly US based, plus a single NZ study establishing indicators for Maaori children (Bevan-Brown, 1993)

Devising the Tool

- Grouping the indicators:
 - Cognition and language (16)
 - Approach to learning (15)
 - Creativity (15)
 - Affective and social skills (14)
- Critiqued for contextual relevancy by NZ academic experts in giftedness and revised

Devising the Tool

- Critiqued by group of early childhood teachers experienced with gifted young children
- Trialled over 5 weeks by sample of 10 childcare and 7 kindergarten centres; 5 oldest boys, 5 oldest girls, adjusted to reflect proportion of Maaori in centre (T=167 3+ yr olds)

Outcomes of Trial

Interviews: four areas of inquiry:

- The tool itself
- The process of using the tool
- Outcomes for child
- Benefits / shortcomings, impact on teacher's understanding of giftedness in early years

Four weeks of follow-up interviews with cross-section sample (6) centres (9 identified children)

Feedback themes (panels)

- Need for indicators highlighting negative, irritating behaviour which might not be seen by teachers as indicative of giftedness
- Need for more indicators relating to leadership and personal qualities, especially relevant to Maaori concept
- Need for indicators that are more explicit regarding culture, especially Maaori (“a consciousness raising/awakening exercise for those who need it”)

Feedback themes (panels)

- Confirmed relevant to NZ early childhood
- Confirmed focus on “gifted behaviours”
- Need for information about what to do next
- Need for space to include observed examples, not just a tick-box

Trial results

- Teachers perceived their understanding of gifted behaviour increased and enabled to identify giftedness through use of tool
- Most often identified were areas of cognition and language and social competence
- Teachers need more information about giftedness relating to diverse cultures and contra-indicators of giftedness

Trial results

- 9 centres reported children displaying gifted behaviours frequently or almost always.
- 18 (11%) children identified, only 9 had been previously suspected (1 had been known).
- Some wording and indicators adjustments
- Detailed descriptors contributed to increased understanding of multi-faceted nature of giftedness and awareness of gifted young children
- Disproportionate identification of Maaori compared to Pakeha – reflective of centre environmental limitations?

Contribution and Values

- “There should be a commitment to, and opportunities for, a Maaori contribution to the programme...children’s cultural values, customs and traditions from home should be nurtured and preserved to enable children to participate successfully... the programme should encompass different cultural perspectives, recognising and affirming the primary importance of the child’s family and culture. “ (Ministry of Education, 1996, p64-65)
- “As the majority of teachers in our schools are white, middle class, monocultural, monolingual and working in an education system that is predominantly ethnocentric, it is natural that their own culturally laden concept of special abilities will influence who gets identified and what type of programme is provided for them. (Bevan-Brown, 1993, p10-11)

Case studies results

- Centres used focus-child/ren observation and planning cycle designed around selected individual goals linked to *Te Whaariki* over 6 weeks, some including parent input through “me” sheet, with occasional mini-plans at other times. Individual notebooks maintained by key staff in some centres
- One centre also used photo displays with captions written with child contribution
- Centres acknowledged lots of daily discussion and planning adjustments made responsively between staff as a group but not documented
- Identification led staff to look at the children in more focused way with increased awareness of strengths

Case studies results

- Daily staff responses often took into account new understanding of behaviours eg allowing continuance of individual work through mat-time, making time for in-depth conversation, opportunities for leadership and role-modeling, and providing more cognitively-complex equipment.
- But individual planning was around perceived deficits or needs for 2 of the 3 children (social skill gaps and self esteem) who were centre “focus-child” during this phase; only 1 centre planned specifically around strengths and interests, and planned for cognitive challenge as well as social, emotional and language.

Conclusions and Implications

- While availability of an identification instrument will result in increased awareness of giftedness, as a component of authentic assessment it needs to be supported by increased teacher education.
- For most centres in the study identification did not lead to other than minor adjustments to the curriculum experienced by the child, focus social behaviour.
- Need for readily available guidance (see Allan, 2002)
- Teachers believed that they needed support services similar to those provided by SES for children with special needs. The lack of programme differentiation in some centres confirms this.

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IDENTIFYING AND
PROVIDING FOR
GIFTEDNESS IN
THE EARLY
YEARS

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Professional Development

- Sensitive to teachers' experiences and backgrounds so build on current concepts and skills (needs analysis)
 - Begin with focus on teachers' beliefs and values
 - Participatory, over time, multiple workshops and planned peer-coaching through on-site visits
 - Include content knowledge and mechanics of programme development
 - Provide time and dialogue opportunities to teachers during “practical problems,” in which teachers “identify real dilemmas, explore these collectively, and return to test theory, seeking resolution in practice” examining and re-forming the beliefs the practices are based on (Bell, p. 113).
- Affirms BES findings re effective PD



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Kei Tua o te Pae: Assessment for Learning



Kei Tua o te Pae

- Focus on assessment as a powerful force for learning
- Assessment *for*, not *of*, learning
- Make visible learning that is valued by the community of learners – validated by multiple voices
- Noticing, recognising, responding
- Credit, not deficit, focus on potential and uncertain possibilities, continuity, holistic, feedback connecting assessment and learning
- Inclusive of the context and interactions – narrative (learning stories)
- Listening to children comment on, plan and assess for their own learning
- Ako – reciprocal learning

Sociocultural basis

- Include children's viewpoint (and parents)
- Recognise influence of assessments on children's identity as learners
- Assessment reflects interconnection of social and cultural worlds of children
- Acknowledge multiple cultural lenses
- Reciprocal, responsive, engaging conversations about learning in progress
- See learning as multi-dimensional

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