

UC
UNIVERSITY OF
CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaki
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Conceptions of giftedness in a global, modern world: Where are we at in Aotearoa New Zealand 2012?

Louise Tapper
University of Canterbury

UC
UNIVERSITY OF
CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaki
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Presentation Outline

- Rationale - why is it important to have a clear conception of giftedness and talent?
- Current trends in conceptualisations.
- Where are we at in Aotearoa New Zealand – is it a minefield?
- What do we know about our own conceptions?
- Issues and recommendations

UC
UNIVERSITY OF
CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaki
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Why do we need to know?

There is still no universal agreement about the notion of giftedness.
“...the term gifted or giftedness has never been more problematic than it is today” (Dai, 2010)

But a clear conception of giftedness is necessary as it is around such a conception that identification, curricula, teaching practices and programming should be based. (Millar, 2008)

UC
UNIVERSITY OF
CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaki
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

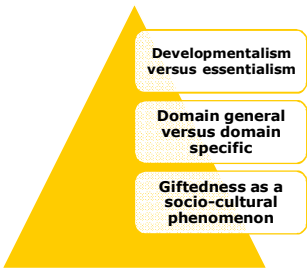
At the heart

“Discussions on the nature of giftedness and talent are at the very heart of gifted education. Parameters of giftedness determine who will be identified as gifted and what the nature of programmes will be that cater for their learning needs. The interrelationship between concept, characteristics, identification and programming is crucial to the understanding of gifted education.”

(McAlpine, 2004)

UC
UNIVERSITY OF
CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaki
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Current Trends in Conceptualising Giftedness



- Developmentalism versus essentialism
- Domain general versus domain specific
- Giftedness as a socio-cultural phenomenon

UC
UNIVERSITY OF
CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaki
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Developmentalism versus essentialism

Essentialist view

- A specific formula for measuring what is gifted and what is not. Tends to be a rigid, categorical perspective.
- A gifted individual possesses fixed traits or core attributes; you have it or you don't.
- Genetically endowed, neurological advantage that will ultimately lead to achievement.

(Balchin, 2009; Dai, 2010; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2008)

Developmentalism versus essentialism



Developmentalist view

- Giftedness is dynamic, malleable and constantly changing.
- It is an interaction between an individual and his/her environment that changes over time.
- Developmentalism sees giftedness as being about diversity, not as a unitary concept.

Developmentalism versus essentialism



- Abilities are shaped by environmental and social factors which can be enabling or limiting.
- A developmental view holds to a temporal state of giftedness. Early signs do not necessarily continue through to later achievement. Different talents have different meanings at various stages of development eg: school house giftedness.

(Balchin, 2009; Horowitz, 2004; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2008; Sternberg, 2000)

Domain general versus domain specific



Domain general

- General intellectual ability transferable from one kind of task to another; applies across a range of human capabilities
- An exceptional ability to reason, to think in abstract ways, to solve problems.

(Dai, 2010; Tannenbaum, 2003)

Domain general versus domain specific



Domain specific

- Excellence in at least one area of aptitude but not necessarily all areas.
- May be exceptional in one domain or even several domains but only average in others.
- Encompasses a more equitable approach; acknowledges asynchronous development.

(Kaufman & Sternberg, 2008; Matthews & Folsom, 2009; Passow, 2003)

Giftedness as a socio- cultural phenomenon



Socio-cultural

- Shift towards awareness of diversity – giftedness means different things to different cultural groups.
- Giftedness is socially constructed – judgments made by those who live and work within respective culture – gatekeepers.
- Giftedness can be seen as being about any abilities, knowledge or traits “that are valued or needed in a given society in a given era.” (Cohen et al, 2000)

Giftedness as a socio- cultural phenomenon



- No single ‘right’ definition of giftedness that holds across culture and time.
- So within one country, school, or classroom there may be several different understandings held by several different groups.

(Cohen, Ambrose & Powell, 2000; Chan, 2009; Phillipson, 2007; Phillipson & McCann, 2009)

Where are we at in Aotearoa New Zealand?



Laissez-faire/hands-off approach to developing any single New Zealand conception.

“No single definition of giftedness and talent is recommended and each school is encouraged to consult with its community to select or develop a concept that is consistent with the values and priorities of the community to which it belongs.” (Moltzen, 2004)

Question???



Where can New Zealand teachers go to for guidance in developing their own idiosyncratic conceptualisation of giftedness and talent?

Handbook – Gifted and Talented Students: Meeting their Needs in New Zealand Schools



'Definitions, Characteristics and Identification'

- The gifted and talented “are not simply those with high intelligence” and “the concept of giftedness and talent has become quite broad over the years” (p.12).
- Recommends that definitions accept 'potential' performance as part of criteria (p.13).

Handbook



- “The gifted and talented represent a wide range of students with many different abilities” (p.12). Goes on to list some of the 'special abilities'.
- “New Zealand is a multi-cultural society with a wide range of ethnic groups...It is important that each school incorporates relevant cultural values into its concept of giftedness and talent” (p.12).

Riley et al Research Report (2004)



- “The concept of giftedness is dynamic, sensitive to time, place and culture” (p.11).
- “Multi-categorical concepts of giftedness and talent appear to be favoured by New Zealand educators – they are broad, inclusive and liberal, sitting well with egalitarian philosophies and beliefs” (p.12).

Other Sources



- Gifted and Talented Online – repeats the Handbook and posts three articles on Gagne's model, plus Renzulli. No real exploration of current conceptualisations.
- ERO report of 2008 had an expectation that “...the school's definition of giftedness and talent reflected the context and values of the school community, was multi-categorical, incorporated Maori concepts, incorporated multi-cultural concepts and was grounded in sound research and theory” (p. 17)

No surprises here!



ERO Report of 2008 found **only 5% of schools reviewed** were working from “highly inclusive and appropriate conceptualisations”.

My contention: Most teachers in New Zealand schools, and probably centres, are still ‘swimming in a sea of uncertainty’ when it comes to understanding the conceptual framework that underpins their pedagogical practices in gifted and talented education.

Issues and Recommendations



- The lack of a current conceptual understanding can lead to the use of an essentialist approach as a fall back position – identification through performance such as National Standards, NCEA results, entrance test results etc = **‘identification crutches’**
- Compliance issues = Gifted Register needs to be filled, pressure to identify gifted and talented students in a school.

Recommendation



1) Rationale for identification should go beyond compliance and be supported by a sound theoretical and conceptual basis.

Issues and Recommendations



- There can be a danger in embracing too broad a definition/concept of giftedness.
- Moltzen (2011) = a “nebulous concept can affect traction for the field” and it can cause confusion for teachers who are left with only broad, inclusive constructions to guide them.

Recommendation



2) Teachers need professional support so that they can engage in rigorous debate and discussion to help them develop a sound conception of giftedness that fits within the context of their school or centre.

Issues and Recommendations



- There has been an increase in research over the past decade looking at socio-cultural aspects of giftedness from a Maori perspective.
- Limited research in New Zealand looking at the conceptualisation of giftedness from the perspective of Pasifika or Asian cultures, both ethnic groups which are widely represented in our schools and centres.

Recommendation

3) In our own multi-cultural society more research could be conducted exploring conceptions of giftedness and talent from the perspectives of Pasifika and Asian cultural identities.

References

- Balchin, T. (2009). The future of the English definition of giftedness. In T. Balchin, B. Hymer & D. J. Matthews (Eds.), *The Routledge international companion to gifted education* (pp. 50-55). London: Routledge.
- Chan, D. W. (2009). Lay conceptions of giftedness among the Chinese people. In T. Balchin, B. Hymer & D. J. Matthews (Eds.), *The Routledge international companion to gifted education* (pp. 115-121). London: Routledge.
- Cohen, L. M., Ambrose, D., & Powell, W. (2000). Conceptual foundations and theoretical lenses for the diversity of giftedness and talent. In K. A. Heller, F. J. Monks, R. J. Sternberg & R. F. Subotnik (Eds.), *International handbook of giftedness and talent* (2nd ed., pp. 331-344). Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd.
- Dai, D. Y. (2010). *The nature and nurture of giftedness: a new framework for understanding gifted education*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Education Review Office (2008). *Schools' provisions for gifted and talented students*. Wellington: Education Review Office.

References cont.

- Horowitz, F. D. (2004). A developmental view of giftedness. In S. M. Reis & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *Definitions and conceptions of giftedness* (pp. 145-154). Thousand Oaks CA: Corwin Press
- Kaufman, S. B., & Sternberg, R. J. (2008). Conceptions of giftedness. In S. I. Pfeiffer (Ed.), *Handbook of giftedness in children: Psycho-educational theory, research and best practices* (pp. 71-92). New York: Springer
- Matthews, D. J., & Folsom, C. (2009). Making connections: cognition, emotion and a shifting paradigm. In T. Balchin, B. Hymer & D. J. Matthews (Eds.), *The Routledge international companion to gifted education* (pp. 18 - 25). London: Routledge.
- McAlpine, D. (2004). What do we mean by gifted and talented? Concepts and definitions. In D. McAlpine & R. Moltzen (Eds.), *Gifted and Talented: New Zealand Perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 33-66). Palmerston North: Kanuka Grove Press.
- Moltzen, R. (2004). Historical perspectives. In D. McAlpine & R. Moltzen (Eds.), *Gifted and talented: New Zealand perspectives* (pp. 1-32). Palmerston North: Kanuka Grove Press

References cont.

- Phillipson, S. N. (2007). A framework for the study of sociocultural perspectives of giftedness. In S. N. Phillipson & M. McCann (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness: Sociocultural perspectives* (pp. 1-34). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Phillipson, S. N., & McCann, M. (2007). Meta-theoretical conceptions of giftedness. In S. Phillipson & M. McCann (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness: Socio-cultural perspectives* (pp. 477-494). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.
- Riley, T. L., Bevan-Brown, J., Bicknell, B., Carroll-Lind, J., & Kearney, A. (2004). *The extent, nature and effectiveness of planned approaches in New Zealand schools for identifying and providing for gifted and talented students*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Sternberg, R. J. (2000). Giftedness as developing expertise. In K. A. Heller, F. J. Monks, R. J. Sternberg & R. F. Subotnik (Eds.), *International handbook of giftedness and talent* (2nd ed., pp. 55-66). Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd.

References cont.

- Tannenbaum, A. J. (2003). Nature and nurture of giftedness. In N. Colangelo & G. A. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education* (pp. 45-59). Boston: Pearson Education Inc.