

## How associate teachers understandings of gifted and talented education influence ways in which students work with gifted and talented children whilst they are on practicum. Melanie Wong (Manukau Institute of Technology) and Dr Jens J. Hansen (Woodhill Park Research Retreat)

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### 1 Introduction

1. This study argues that although provision for gifted and talented children is a feature of *Te Whaariki*, the special learning needs of gifted and talented children are not always met. We argue that this is primarily because teachers have not adequately considered the pedagogy of gifted and talented education during their initial teacher education programmes.
2. In reality, when they enter teaching situations, many teachers are unable to recognise gifted and talented children with whom they work. They know little about how best to include them in their current suite of professional practices because they have not been taught how best to cater for their needs.
3. This presentation outlines a proposed pilot project that will explore the views of associate teachers with respect to their understandings of gifted and talented education. Amongst other things, the intended pilot project will investigate how associate teachers support student teachers working with gifted and talented children while they are on practicum. The reason for concentrating on the views of associate teachers is because they can have important sway upon the development of newly emerging teachers.

### 2 Te Whaariki and NZ government documents - some preliminary comments

1. According to the Ministry of Education, "*Te Whaariki* is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and anticipates that special needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood education settings" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.11). However, *Te Whaariki* does not specifically mention the need to cater for gifted and talented learners.
2. Current Gifted Education policy indicates that New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC) has decreed that programmes should focus on teacher responsiveness to a range of students (Ministry of Education, 2001). However, Riley and Rawlinson (2008) noted that even though including course content on gifted and talented education was compulsory, the offerings were not comprehensive. In particular, they noted a lack of practical teaching and learning opportunities for early childhood teachers participating in teacher education programmes

(Riley & Rawlinson, 2008). If they're not told about gifted and/or talented children, how can they be expected to know? It's a self-fulfilling cycle of accepting mediocrity.

3. It is speculated that because there has been little guidance from government, early childhood teacher education programmes curriculum content pays scant attention to introducing student teachers to pedagogy for gifted and talented children. Moreover, it seems programmes largely overlook (or totally ignore) sessions on how best to cater for the needs of gifted and talented children.

### 3 What do associate teachers do?

This slide explains what Associate Teachers are and describes what they do.

4. Associate teachers are contracted by teacher education providers to support student teachers on placement. Students go on placement to learn about creating, maintaining and extending practical and professional practices. According to McDonald (2004), these skills are a consequence of guidance, mutual learning and friendship between associate teachers and student teachers.
5. In reality, being a good early childhood teacher does not always guarantee that a teacher will be an effective associate teacher (McDonald, 2004, p.90) because different skills are needed when guiding student teachers.
6. There is an absence of research about the ways Associate Teachers lead students in the field of providing for gifted and/or talented children which is why this research is being undertaken. Put another way, even though it is known that associate teachers impact significantly upon the professional development of student teachers (Clarke & Jarvis-Selinger, 2005 and Crawford & Pattullo, 2004), no study is available about how they influence student teachers dealing with gifted and/or talented children.

### 4 A possible approach to discovery

Initially it is intended that associate teachers will be surveyed (Survey Monkey) to gauge:

7. Their understandings of 'gifted and talented', and...
8. How they support student teachers working with gifted and talented children while they are on practicum.

Survey Monkey will be used because:

1. This is a pilot study.
2. It is quick, simple and economical to use and yields rapid results (especially in the first 48 hours).

Above all, because this is a pilot study, this exercise will inform the planning of 'the next steps' which is a 'grounded methodology' (Hansen, 1995).

It is anticipated that a more detailed study could be launched (e.g. Teaching & Learning Research Initiative) with possible partners being University of Canterbury, Woodhill Park Research Retreat, and, one other tertiary provider as well as MIT.

Are there participants here who might want to be involved in such a study?

## 5 The benefits of this study

Overall, the investigator will develop a heightened appreciation of the extent to which associate teachers understand gifted and talented education.

More specifically it is hoped that:

The study will explain how associate teachers support practicum students whenever they interact with gifted and talented children in centres. This means that ways of improving support for associate teachers working with students will be developed not only with respect to their work with student teachers, but also with regard to their day-to-day interaction with children at their centre.

In addition, it is hoped that this study will show to what extent, if at all, policies and teacher education programmes for gifted and talented children within Aotearoa New Zealand could be usefully adjusted. Perhaps GiftedNZ may benefit and may want to become involved?

Specifically, it is also hoped that this project will support the revision of the MIT Associate Teacher course. That course provides associate teachers with strategies for working collaboratively with student teachers so that they can better guide, support and assess the learning of students.

The data will also inform a doctoral thesis that has been shaped for approval and commencement in the 2012 academic year.

## 6 Selected references

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