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**Gifted around the Globe: Gifted and Talented  
Education in International Schools**

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degree of

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## **Abstract**

Gifted education in international schools is an area that is yet to be fully investigated. The aim of this study was to explore the ways in which international schools identify gifted students and provide for their individual needs. Issues for international schools that were identified in the literature review included: cultural and linguistic diversity of students and the community, high teacher and student mobility and availability of provisions. A multiple case study design was used. Nineteen international schools from Europe, Asia and the Middle East were invited to participate in the study; however, only two schools participated in the study. The guiding principles, identification procedures and range of provisions were explored through an examination of relevant documentation, interviews with three staff members from each school, and a questionnaire presented to all teaching staff. The findings were analysed using a cross case procedure and pattern matching.

The findings of the study indicate that the definitions and policy document created by the school are important for shared understandings of giftedness. Staff expertise and attitudes towards identifying gifted students from diverse cultures may impact the effectiveness of the school's gifted programme. In both schools a tension between retaining the home-country's ethos and internationalism and inclusivity was identified through the schools' use of some culturally biased assessment practices, and little planning for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Finally, staff and student mobility was found to have an impact on the effectiveness of identification and practices for provision.

Recommendations for international schools include: creating a definition and policy suited to the school; creating opportunities for professional development, and making links with the school and wider community. The findings of this study are limited due to the small number of case studies used. It is suggested that similar research is undertaken with a larger and more diverse group of schools.

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## **Chapter One** **Introduction**

There are many issues within the international school context that will influence the identification of and provision for gifted and talented learners. These include a culturally and linguistically diverse school community; and a transient population of both staff and students. Operating in a community that may hold differing attitudes towards both education and giftedness and speaks a different language to that of the school may also impact upon the availability of provisions outside the classroom. Domestic schools face these issues as well, but perhaps not in similar combinations, or as commonly as in an international context.

There has been research in the field of gifted education that focuses on underrepresented ethnic populations and bilingualism (Bernal, 2002; Cross, 2007; deWet, 2005; Ford & Moore, 2004; Harris, Rapp, Martinez & Plucker, 2007; Milner, 2005). A review of the literature found magazine articles with 'advice' for parents of gifted students who are considering an overseas posting. These were published by expatriate organisations and governmental organisations. Academic research into policies and programs for gifted and talented students in international schools is sparse.

### **Rationale**

Many international schools claim that they are able to cater for the needs of gifted and talented students by virtue of their academically and culturally rich, private school setting. The United States of America's Department of State

(2010) informs parents that: 'Traditionally, international schools have not offered a separate program for formally identifying gifted students. Additionally, special educational opportunities and accommodations are NOT required by law for gifted children as they are for other exceptionalities. There is not even a common definition of giftedness agreed upon by all schools systems and academic institutions'.

I have spent the last seven years working in three international schools. I am also part of the 'International Baccalaureate' educators network for the Asia-Pacific region. Over the course of my international experience, I have observed little systematic, evidence-based decision making by schools to support the learning and development of their gifted and talented students. Furthermore, I also encountered many issues working in an international context that made it difficult to plan learning experiences for all students, let alone those with exceptional abilities, such as planning field trips and arranging guest speakers. Students continually leaving or starting at the school also made formative assessment and planning for differentiation challenging, as it takes time to establish relationships and get to know students' strengths. The field of gifted education is attracting attention from some schools, as promoting the academic success of its students and 'academic rigour' can be a 'marketing point' to differentiate a school from its competitors in the community.

#### Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the ways in which international schools define and identify gifted students, and then go on to select and plan provisions to suit their individual needs. It is also an objective of the



study to identify issues that may be brought about by the international context of the school, and examine the ways in which the schools manage these issues.

After identifying the gap in current research, and the need for strategies for catering for gifted and talented students in international schools, I selected the following research questions and objectives to bring more evidence to the field of gifted education in international schools.

### Research Questions

1. How are gifted and talented students identified in international schools?
2. What principles and practices are in place in international schools to support the needs of gifted and talented students?

### The objectives of this research are to:

-Identify principles and practices to identify gifted and talented students in international schools

-Examine and analyse the gifted and talented policies of international schools

-Examine and analyse the information presented to the school's community about gifted and talented students via the school website and parent handbooks

-Identify principles and practices pertaining to providing programmes in international schools

-Use the information collected to devise a set of recommendations with regards to policy, identification and possible options for provision that 'best fit'

an international school context.

To meet these objectives I wanted to describe the practices of international schools, so a qualitative approach was appropriate. In order to be able to generalise the findings as much as possible to make them useful to other international schools, I chose a multiple case study design.

This thesis is organised into the following chapters:

- Chapter Two is a review of the literature which explores in greater depth the notion of giftedness, features of international schools, the influences of culture, language and mobility.
- Chapter Three describes the case study design method in theory and as applied in this study, including the techniques of data collection and analysis.
- Chapter Four presents the research findings of this study. These are organised into the guiding principles of the school, practice and principles for identification and provision, and the barriers and enablers that are at work in the school's context.
- Chapter Five discusses key themes from the research findings from both schools and makes links with relevant research. Recommendations for international schools, the limitations of the study, and areas for further research are also discussed.

## **Chapter Two** **Literature review**

There are many issues within the international school context that will influence the identification of and provision for gifted and talented learners. Domestic schools face these issues as well, but perhaps not in similar combinations, or as commonly as in an international context. There has been research in the field of gifted education that focuses on underrepresented ethnic populations and bilingualism (Bernal, 2002; Cross, 2007; deWet, 2005; Ford & Moore, 2004; Harris, Rapp, Martinez & Plucker, 2007; Milner, 2005), but research into policies and programs for gifted and talented students in international schools is difficult to locate.

This literature review will define the term ‘international school’, and outline some of the curricula and accreditation bodies commonly used by international schools and these organisations’ requirements for the schools’ practice with gifted students. This review will then use the concept of ‘environmental and interpersonal catalysts’ and the ‘developmental process’ as described in Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) (2008) to examine in more detail themes within the international context; and the issues and barriers that impact upon the identification of, and provision for the special educational needs of gifted students in international schools.

### **Giftedness and the International school Context**

An international school is a school that does not require the language of instruction or the curriculum to be that of the host country. This may be to enable students to ‘fit back’ into their national curriculum, or it may be to

provide for families who are interested in internationalism or bilingualism (education.com, 2011). These schools could be corporately owned, or run as a not for profit organisation, and cater for the children of people who work at international organisations, or foreign embassies. There will also be a percentage of local students who attend the school to learn the language or gain a perceived 'better qualification'.

International schools are now widely offering concept driven, inquiry based curricula, such as the International Baccalaureate (IBO)– a prestigious and rigorous programme, designed to shape 'global citizens' and looked upon favourably by many undergraduate training facilities worldwide (IBO, 2010; Ramirez, 2008).

International schools are largely independent, although schools that use the International Baccalaureate are required to meet a set of standards in order to be authorised, and the school's evidence for meeting these is evaluated every five years. Similarly, some international schools may choose to belong to an accreditation body such as the Council of International Schools (CIS, 2009), or the European Council of International Schools (ECIS, 2011).

Schools that are not aligned with national government requirements are able to choose their own definitions for giftedness and decide on measures that they can take to provide for these students that best suits their context. Depending on the culture of the host country, and the expectations of the parents, students and staff, each school may develop their own unique interpretation of what it means to be gifted. The definition for giftedness taken on by the school will certainly influence the procedures used to identify students, and the approach taken for provision (Cross, 2007). Esquivel and Houtz (1999)

suggest that an international definition of giftedness should be broad and culturally defined and embedded.

Our current worldwide understanding of the multifaceted nature of 'giftedness' is dynamic, exemplified by theories such as Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (1996), Renzulli's Three Ring Definition ((1978), and Sternberg and Davidson's (1986) assertion that giftedness is made up of multiple qualities, including motivation, creativity and self-concept, as well as the traditional notion of high intelligence (Sternberg & Davidson, 1986).

Sternberg (2007) contends that for an individual to be considered gifted, they must 'possess a high level of an attribute that is rare relative to their peers' . More specifically, Gagné (2003) suggests that gifts are considered to be natural attributes in at least one area that places an individual in the top ten percent of their age peers. Renzulli (1978) suggests that individuals must have a range of characteristics such as above average ability, creativity and task commitment that converge to be expressed as giftedness.

Harris, Rapp, Martinez and Plucker (2007) also point out that giftedness is culturally defined, so we could also consider a student's ability to reach goals in their own sociocultural context as a characteristic of giftedness, which has implications for the international school context, given that they are made up of more than one culture; that of the school, and that of the host country (Sternberg, 2007). Whatever the precise definition of giftedness, it is a commonly held belief that characteristics of gifted individuals are varied and unique, threaded with common points of similarity (Reis & Small, 2005).

**The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (Gagné, 2008 Revision)**  
**and its application to the international school context.**

The concepts of 'gifted' and 'talented' are widely used without any agreement amongst professionals of their precise definition (Morelock, 1996). Likewise, there are many models and theories in the field of gifted education to describe giftedness and the way in which it manifests and develops in learners. Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (Fig. 1, 2008 revision) is an attempt to make an exact definition of the terms 'giftedness' and 'talent' and to use these terms to describe a developmental process.

Giftedness is described in this model as the possession of natural, untrained abilities or aptitudes. These abilities are in one or more domains and of a level that places the person in the top ten percent of their age peers (Gagné, 2003). Talent is defined as the mastery of systematically developed skills or knowledge in one or more fields that place an individual in the top ten percent of their age peers in that field (Gagné, 2003). Gagné proposes that natural abilities (gifts) become systematically developed skills (talent) through a developmental process, which is influenced by environmental and intrapersonal factors, called catalysts, as well as plain old luck, labelled 'chance'.

The DMGT is an appropriate model for an international school to adopt and adapt. Its real strength lies in the emphasis and description of environmental and intrapersonal catalysts that educators must take into account when working with children to develop talents from gifts in an international context. The features in this model are of course applicable to describe influences in the lives of many gifted and talented people, however, catalysts

such as milieu are particularly powerful influences in the lives of children who attend international schools.

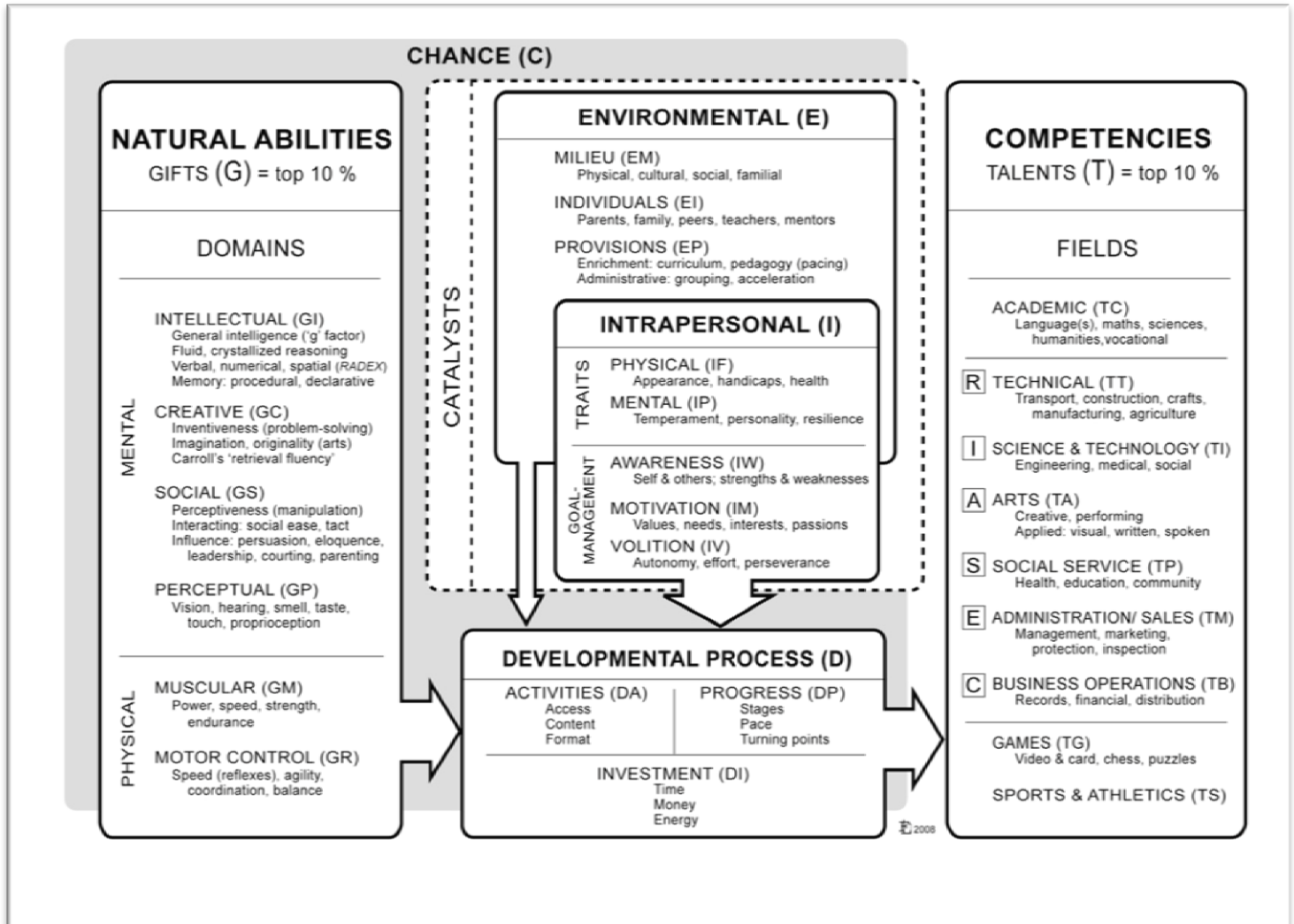


Fig. 1: The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (Gagné, 2008)

## **Catalysts and their implications on the talent development process for gifted and talented students in International schools.**

### **Policies and provisions for gifted and talented students in international schools**

A lack of research and evidence in this field suggests that many international schools do not cater for the needs of gifted students by offering specific programs for identification or provision (Robinson, 2006). Many international schools claim that an inquiry driven curriculum is sufficiently rich and the environment challenging by virtue of its unique international setting (US Department of State, 2010). Indeed, an examination of the websites of twenty international schools from Europe, Asia and the Middle East, revealed only three schools that made mention of a gifted policy or even a special educational needs policy or program.

The DMGT (2008) describes the talent development process as the transformation of natural abilities into systematically developed skills. This happens through 'provisions', often taking place within formal institutional learning. It appears that International schools do less for children with special education needs, including gifted and talented, than is the minimum currently required by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. This implies that the talent development of gifted students may be negatively affected, particularly when other environmental factors in international contexts may also work to the detriment of the process.

The Council of International Schools requires that member-schools provide evidence for how they will provide for the needs of students with specific educational needs, stating: 'Children with learning differences or specific needs who are admitted



into the school shall be given support to access and enhance participation in the learning environment through appropriate and effective programmes that are delivered by suitably qualified personnel' (Standard E2, pg. 3, CIS, 2010). There is no specific requirement however, that there is a policy in place or any specific reference to gifted and talented students. Likewise, the website of the European Council for International schools made no mention of gifted and talented policy or program design.

The International Baccalaureate program, while not aimed specifically at gifted and talented learners, has scope for enrichment and acceleration with its heavy emphasis on inquiry learning and differentiated two level courses for languages, Mathematics, and Sciences. Again, the International Baccalaureate Organization does not require that international schools write policies for gifted and talented students; however, there is the requirement that 'the school provides support for their students with learning and/or special educational needs (pg.3, IBO Standards and Practices, 2010). Additionally, the IBO 'online curriculum centre' has a resource bank of information for teachers about the theories of writers such as Sternberg and Renzulli and ideas for practice through differentiation and enrichment (IBO, 2007).

One of the few pieces of literature related to education for learners with special educational needs and targeted directly at (American) international schools has been created by The Overseas Schools Advisory Council of the U.S. Department of State, (Kusuma-Powell & Powell, 2004). 'Count Me In! Developing Inclusive International schools' is a package aimed to encourage U.S. schools

overseas to develop their provision for children who are gifted, have learning disabilities or special learning needs, or have limited English proficiency.

There is a wide range of options that international schools may choose to provide for the special educational needs of students. These include; withdrawal programmes, acceleration and enrichment, and differentiation within the classroom (Gagné, 2008). Other options such as mentorships may be more challenging for schools to organise, given that resources may be limited due to language barriers with businesses and organisations within the community. Additionally, some International schools are located in cities where it may not be safe or appropriate for students to make links with other schools or community members due to conflict or local attitude towards foreigners and education.

### Events

Gagné (2003) believes that events such as winning awards and taking part in competitions can have a positive or negative effect on the transformation of gifts to talents. For gifted and talented students, competitions particularly are opportunities to perform and exhibit their special abilities, and to maximise abilities and talents in a wide array of subjects (Riley & Karnes, 2006). Competitions can be very motivating as students can work together with others of similar ability, and receive recognition and acknowledgement of their achievements, so these events and opportunities can enhance the talent development process.

At international schools, events that are traditionally possible forums for gifted and talented learners to shine are often less frequent than opportunities in

domestic schools. There are some opportunities however, in the form of International competitions such as The Future Problem Solving Program (Future Problem Solving Program International, 2011) which includes teams from other domestic and international schools around the world.

National competitions in which a student has the opportunity to test their developing talents, science fairs, sporting, writing and music competitions are common events for students in most schools to take part. In international schools there is the issue that there is not always a large pool of schools with a common language in any one country, which may impact participation in team competitions. Furthermore, in my experience, I have discovered that many competitions have restrictions on the nationality of the participants, which may prevent international students from entering national competitions.

### Individuals

#### *High teacher turnover*

Teachers, staff and families in the school community have an effect on the talent development process. A high turnover of teachers is recognised as having great potential for causing disruption of student learning, and as being detrimental for creating a cohesive school culture (Plecki, Knapp & Elfers, 2006).

In an international context, there is usually a high turnover of staff. Mancuso, Roberts and White's (2010) study of 22 international schools found that between 17 and 60% of staff leave each year. Similarly, Odland's (2007) report found that of the 270 schools surveyed, an average of 14.4% of staff left each year. Comparatively, New Zealand schools have a turnover of 7-12% of

staff per year (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2011). International schools that have a good retention of teachers often publish the fact on their websites, which is also an indication of its importance. With a great movement of staff each year, the potential to create a common set of understandings and practices about the ways in which the school will identify and provide for the needs of gifted students is likely to be compromised.

### *High mobility of families*

High mobility of families is a feature of most international schools. Many families stay in one city for two to three years to complete a work contract before moving again either back to their home country or to another international posting. Many students in international schools may have lived in many different countries and experienced many different curricula throughout their school careers.

Unseem (2001) has described a 'Third culture' in which the student is removed from their native culture, yet not integrated into the host culture. Sheard (2008) suggests that the very event of moving to another country is a powerful influence on a child. Characteristics of 'Third culture kids' are self and global awareness, excellent adaptive strategies, asynchronous development with same-age children in their home country, and an ability to relate to a diverse range of people (McCraig, 1994; Unseem 2001). Many of these are also characteristics of gifted students (Sheard, 2008).

Negative influences that arise from moving schools frequently, and that may affect motivation and success at school may be feelings of not fitting into any particular culture, 'missing' key curriculum experiences and content, and

loss of important relationships between peers and mentor. Hattie (2009) also notes that moving schools has an extremely negative effect on student learning of basic skills. Additionally, students may not be identified as having exceptional abilities as they also may take on strategies to mask their abilities because they believe it will impact upon peer acceptance in a new school (Lewis, 2008; Sheard, 2008).

Students who stay in a school for a short time may not have opportunities to demonstrate natural abilities, and communication between prior and new schools is often unreliable, thus further reducing the likelihood that the student's gifts are recognised.

During the transition period between schools, parents are able to inform teachers if their child was considered to be gifted or above average at the previous school. deWet (2005) suggests that family members can also be used as mentors to work with individuals and resources of information for units of work, furthering the value of that culture in the classroom. Teachers are also often encouraged to read past reports and notes.

Many international schools require benchmark testing, a reference from the previous school, or an interview as part of their enrolment process. This is at the discretion of the school and there is no formal tracking process. As previously suggested, curriculum experience, and masking behaviours may impact on the reliability of these enrolment measures. As mentioned previously, not all gifted learners will be demonstrating their potential in class. As well as the forced choice dilemma, gifts may also be masked by low self-esteem, frustration, behaviour problems, and learning disabilities that, due to high

mobility, may not have been identified by previous schools (Bedfordshire County Council, 2006).

Harris et al (2007) suggest that measures for identifying gifted and talented children should be ongoing throughout the year, rather than just at entry to the school or at the beginning or end of the year. This is important, as teachers need time to get to know the students, and observe their work on many tasks in a range of contexts and curriculum areas.

#### Milieu:

Gagné's environmental catalysts include 'culture' as part of the milieu; a catalyst that can impact upon the talent development process. It is also asserted that the culture of the students and their families, as well as the cultural experience of the teachers can influence whether a student is identified as being gifted, and what is appropriate provision for them to optimise their learning experience.

Culture refers to a group's beliefs, attitudes, habits, values and practices, and impacts on the way a learner behaves at school (Ford, 2003). A person's culture shapes their views on friendship, authority and what is valuable to learn or do. Cohen (1990) states that 'gifted students can be described as possessing an abundance of certain abilities that are most highly valued within a particular society'. Skills that are valued are those that are necessary for success in everyday life (Sternberg, 2007). For example, in some African and Latino cultures there is a high value placed on interpersonal and socioemotional gifts

and less value placed on academic skills (Ford, Grantham & Whiting, 2008; Ford & Moore, 2004).

*Differing training and cultural experiences of the teachers*

Classroom teachers are usually the staff members on 'the front line' of identifying students with exceptional abilities. In many schools it is also the teachers who are given the task of differentiating learning experiences for students with special educational needs. In international schools, teachers are from a wide range of training and cultural backgrounds and so have different expectations and opinions of gifted education. For example, Hui's (2003) study of Chinese teachers' conceptions of giftedness found that gifted education is unpopular in China, with more emphasis placed on equity and cooperation than excellence and competition. Teachers did not believe that rarity was an important criterion for being gifted, which is contrary to several current theories of giftedness.

Research has suggested that aside from linguistic bias, teachers may also overlook signs of giftedness in children whose communication or cognitive styles are different to those used in their own cultures (Ford, 2005). Similarly, Cross's (2007) study, looking into the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in gifted programmes, found that teachers develop their own conceptions of giftedness, and are likely to identify students who fit these. Milner and Ford (2007) also note that teachers often ignore cultural differences and focus instead on treating everyone the same. This is known as a lack of 'cultural competence' (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Clearly, factors such as these may make the identification of children with exceptional natural abilities problematic.

### *The culture of the students and their families*

The wide range of cultures within the student population is one of the most unique characteristics of an international school. A survey of twenty International schools' data bases revealed a range of 32-103 nationalities represented in the student body (Search Associates, 2011). In an international school, the differing cultural expectations held by students and families about the role of education, and the nature of giftedness certainly will have an effect on the talent development process. There is also likely to be a cultural influence of the host country on the school's ethos and access to community opportunities. While there is little research on this issue, comparisons could be made with differing cultural expectations held by Aboriginal families in state Australian schools, or Hispanic students in American schools.

Curriculum content and styles of delivery, and thereby the education experienced by children, will differ widely from culture to culture. Therefore in an international classroom with culturally diverse students, it is important to consider: the ways in which gifted and talented behaviours may be expressed; that what is valuable to our culture may be less valuable to others; and the differing roles and expectations of family. Schools often rely on the results of tests to identify children who may be gifted and talented. We must consider that testing outside of the cultural context of the student may fail as a tool for identification (Ford, Moore & Milner, 2005; Harris et al, 2007; Sternberg, 2007).

Bernal (2002) recommends that a multicultural school should use a multicultural curriculum. Schools need to ensure that the curriculum content is



meaningful for their students, using examples in learning experiences that are relevant to the cultures represented in the school (deWet, 2005; Ford et al, 2005). The curriculum should be written with inclusion as a goal, as well as to offer international students opportunities to learn about global issues and cultures (Baldwin, 2002). Cultural awareness, tools for good practice and strategies to identify gifted and talented students from diverse cultures should be included in teacher training and professional development (Ford, 2005; Baldwin, 2002).

Further research into the topic of cultural expectations of giftedness and education, as well as norms for a range of national curricula, could enable educators in an international context to have some preparation for families arriving at their schools (Esquivel & Houtz, 1999). Communication with, and inclusion of, families from the representative cultures of the school is also beneficial to ensure their viewpoints are reflected in the policy and practices of the school (Harris et al., 2007).

### Language

The links that will enable strong connections for students at international schools to academic and social opportunities are language and communication. Language is part of the student's culture and communication is an intra and interpersonal concept, so it aligns with both the environment and intrapersonal catalyst concepts.

Identifying children with natural abilities can be difficult when the students have limited English. They may not perform as well on tests as would

be expected from someone who is gifted, and will participate less in oral activities such as class discussions and offering answers to questions. Research has found that linguistically diverse students are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs (Cross, 2007; Esquivel & Houtz, 1999; Harris et al, 2007; National Academy of Sciences, 2002).

Students arriving at an international school are often in need of English language support (or the language of instruction). Teachers are less likely to expect the best from students who cannot communicate proficiently in the language of instruction (deWet, 2005; Harris et al., 2007). deWet (2005) describes the case of a young girl who was in the top ten percent of students in her home country, found herself in remedial classes at her new school because of her limited English proficiency, implying that teachers may interchange limited English proficiency with ability. Furthermore, Harris et al. (2007) note that often in schools there is poor communication between the English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher and class teachers, thus reducing opportunities to highlight gifted and talented behaviours. It is also interesting to note that an English language learner needs seven years to acquire the same level of cognitive academic language before they can begin to perform as well as native speakers on standardised tests (Collier, 1987, in Freeman, 1988).

If test scores and IQ measures are the primary method of identifying students with gifts, then children who are new to English (or the language of instruction) are at a serious disadvantage (Castellano, 2002; Harris et al., 2007). Many identification procedures may be ineffective for linguistically and culturally diverse students (Frasier & Passow, 1994, in Reis & Small, 2005 ).

## **Summary**

In summary, there are many issues within the international context that could impact upon whether students are identified as being gifted and how an International school may plan provisions to meet their needs. Many of these issues can be viewed as the 'environmental catalysts' of Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (2008), which describe how gifts are systematically developed into competencies, or talents.

The issues surrounding the identification of gifted learners include the teacher's 'cultural competence' or, understanding of the culture of the students and how giftedness may manifest in different ways, depending on what skills and qualities are valued by the student and their family. Similarly, a student may not be identified as gifted if they have a low level of English, or the language of instruction of the school. As Cohen (1990) contends, most procedures for identifying the gifted have been developed for middle class, English-speaking children. The high mobility of families and lack of reliable tracking systems between schools may also be a barrier to identification.

International schools are not required to develop their own definitions of giftedness and policy statements. Curriculum accreditation bodies such as the IBO and CIS require that schools cater for students' individual needs, but there is no specific set of guidelines or recommendations for schools to follow.

From the lack of evidence in the research or school websites, it is difficult to ascertain whether International schools commonly devise specific provisions for their gifted students beyond classroom differentiation. However, programmes such as the International Baccalaureate, commonly used in international schools, are inquiry based and concept driven which allows scope

for gifted learners to be challenged and have some choice in their learning.

Additionally, two level courses in some subjects allow for enrichment.

Finally, the location of the international school in a host country creates some issues not faced by domestic schools that may impact upon the provisions the school could create for gifted learners. These include, a more limited number of opportunities within the community, such as mentorships and competitions, due to the host country having a different language, attitude towards foreigners, safety or different approach towards education.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **A Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative research aims to explore and describe concepts, perspectives and meanings influencing a situation (Berg, 2009; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Qualitative research develops understanding of an issue from a participant's perspective within a natural setting (Wood, 2006).

A qualitative approach is appropriate given that it is the aim of this research to investigate and describe current and ongoing issues within and between international schools' approaches to the education of gifted and talented students.

This chapter outlines the theoretical reasoning behind the research methodology for this study, and describes the ways in which data was collected and analysed.

#### **Research questions and objectives**

The questions for this study were devised in response to prior reading and research in the field of gifted and talented education. I have worked in international schools for a number of years and have noticed that there is little theory or research in gifted education within our context.

-How are gifted and talented students identified in international schools?

-What principles and practices are in place in international schools to support the needs of gifted and talented students?

The objectives of this research are to:

-Identify principles and practices to identify gifted and talented students in two international schools

-Examine and analyse the gifted and talented policies of two international schools

-Examine and analyse the information presented to the school's community about gifted and talented students via the school website and parent handbooks

-Identify principles and practices to providing programmes in two international schools

-Use the information collected to devise a set of recommendations with regards to policy, identification and possible options for provision that 'best fit' an international school context.

### **The Methodology in Theory**

#### A multiple case study design

The research questions were answered using a multiple case study design. A case study methodology describes the systematic gathering of information about a person, social setting, event or group to permit the

researcher to understand how or why the subject operates in a real life setting (Berg, 2009).

The goal of a case study is to either gain further understanding of a particular case or to gain insights into an issue or refine a theory (Berg, 2009). Dempster, Freakley and Parry (2002) note that case studies in an educational context provide 'a reality bridge' between theory and practice. They can show us what theory looks like in practice, as well as helping to develop an understanding of the theoretical framework themselves. Case studies are also sympathetic to constructivist pedagogies, as the researchers generate their own meaning and knowledge from their responses to the results of the inquiry.

Multiple case studies use several examples (cases) to allow better or broader understanding (Berg, 2009). Yin (2003) describes how multiple case studies can be used to either, "(a) predict similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predicts contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)" (p. 47). Miles and Huberman (1994 in Herbert, 2005) believe that studying multiple cases can increase generalisability and develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations.

A multiple or collective case study will allow the researcher to analyze within each setting and across settings. A multiple case study enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases. Cases must therefore be chosen so that the researcher may predict patterns and trends occurring between the cases (Yin, 2003).

The design of a case study should be planned carefully. The question must be formulated and a plan made of how and what data will be collected. Data must then be collected and analysed to inform a conclusion and possibly

explain a phenomena (Poskitt, 2009). Case studies are informed by theory and most case studies are presented with a review of current literature and theory and an explanation of how this is linked to the case study.

Theory could be uncovered and informed as a consequence of data collection and analysis from a case study (Berg, 2009). Theories may be built (grounded theory) as they are supported by evidence gathered in case studies and contradictions or paradoxes raised by case study may lead to creative insight. Moreover, emergent theories can be tested and measured leading to identification of false hypotheses

and so the resultant theory is likely to be empirically valid (Berg, 2009).

Reference to existing theory to support the case study can assist in selecting case to study or design and support generalizations (Berg, 2009).

#### Problems, issues and questions surrounding case studies

The key problem facing a researcher using a case study methodology is that of objectivity. Where most data is qualitative, it is open to the interpretation of the researcher, which may differ to that of the participants. Investigators should clearly articulate what has been discovered and how, and give participants opportunity to read draft work and findings. Herbert's (2005) methodology included a section on the 'trustworthiness' of his case study. He describes the way he has increased the validity and reliability of data by having research partners play 'devil's advocate' to check analyses, using tape recordings and detailed field notes, double checking data, checking for negative theories, and using triangulation, amongst other methods.



### Data Collection for a multiple case study

Case studies should be informed by multiple data sources such as interviews, observations and archival information.

The researcher should demonstrate an inquiring mind – asking questions before, during and after data collection, and have good listening and observation skills. It is important for researchers to have adaptability/flexibility – for example Herbert's (2005) methodology used in the comparative case study describe the interview questions as 'semi-structured' , open ended, and designed to talk about general themes naturally.

The researcher should have a good understanding of the issues being investigated – demonstrated by a thorough literature review. Finally – they should aim to achieve an unbiased interpretation of data - reporting preliminary findings to subject and peers for constructive feedback and possible alternative interpretations of data (Berg, 2009; Poskitt, 2009).

### Validity and reliability

A good quality research design should consider validity and reliability. Construct validity ensures multiple evidence sources, a chain of evidence, and that key informants view and approve drafts. Internal validity looks at pattern matching for causal case studies and external validity of multiple case studies aims to generalise findings. Reliable case study designs means that another researcher could take a similar case with the same design and achieve similar results (Poskitt, 2009).

A case study's findings may not be able to provide understanding about other similar cases or subjects. A good case study design however and the use of multiple case studies or evidence from reviewed case studies can make findings more generalisable, thereby improving external validity.

Triangulation is the method of obtaining data from multiple data sources, thereby confirming results and making them more convincing. With data triangulation, issues of construct validity can be overcome, as multiple data sources describe the same phenomena (Yin, 2009).

Data can be collected to inform a multiple case study from a number of sources. These include formal or semi-structured interviews, examination of relevant documentation, observations, and where appropriate, questionnaires.

### Questionnaires

Questionnaires are an efficient way to collect data and can be seen as reliable, as they ask the same questions of all participants (Southward & Connor, 1999). Questionnaires however, are difficult to construct, and must be planned carefully to ensure that there are no ambiguous or leading questions. Munn and Drever (1991, in Southward & Connor, 1999) suggest that questionnaire should be quick to complete and easy to understand. Additionally, questionnaires are self-report measures, and research infers that people do not always portray themselves truthfully when responding to questionnaires (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

### Interviews

'The interview is the most direct way of finding out why a person does something, or what his beliefs or opinions are' (Hook, 1985, in Southward & Connor, 1999).

Interviews are considered to be one of the essential sources of case study information. It is important that the researcher establish a rapport with the participant (Woods, 2006). Additionally, the researcher has to ask questions in an unbiased manner, while following their own line of inquiry (Yin, 2009).

### Documentation

Yin (2009) views documentation as vital in data collection for case studies and as most valuable to corroborate and augment information from other sources. Likewise, Hancock and Algozzine (2006) describe document analysis as a rich source of information with which to augment data collected through interviews.

### Analysis of data

Content analysis is a detailed and systematic arranging and interpretation of information to increase the researcher's understanding of them and enable the reporting of findings (Berg, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Analysis should attempt to explain causal links, describe, illustrate and explore and should be derived from all relevant evidence, include all competing interpretations (Poskitt, 2009). Yin (2003) lists five techniques for analysis: pattern matching, linking data to propositions, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis.

### **The Methodology in Action**

There is little research that examines gifted education in international schools. There is however, research that looks at the representation of non-native English speakers in gifted and talented programmes, the issue of culture

in gifted education and the influence of the values held by teachers of the identification of gifted students. I am seeking to link this research with the results of the study, and to generate new understandings in the fields of both gifted and international education.

#### Choosing a sample and inviting participants (Appendix A)

In choosing a sample, the issues of geographical location, the timing of the school year, and the curriculum of the school were considered. I wanted to work with schools that were on similar or 'workable' time zones to enable scheduling of interviews. I also considered the school year, given that schools in the Northern and Southern hemispheres have different calendars, and may have busier times of the year for staff to have time to attend interviews and answer questionnaires.

I aimed to have schools from different geographical locations, preferably not all schools would be in countries where English is the first language. Finally, I wanted a mixture of curricula to see what influence these had on the ways in which the schools identified and provided for the needs of gifted and talented students.

To invite schools to participate, I wrote an invitation letter and attached the research 'Information sheet' to the Principals (Appendix A). Initially, I invited four schools from Asia, four schools from Europe and three schools from the Middle East. From the eleven invited, two schools responded. I invited a further five schools from Asia and three from Europe. Of these nineteen invitations, two schools committed to participating in the study. One school responded that their

staff did not have time to participate. One school expressed an interest and some staff completed the questionnaire, but then the school withdrew due to 'lack of time'. A further school responded that they had already committed to other research projects. The other fourteen schools returned no response.

It was intended that the external validity of this study, would be strengthened by the use of more than one case study of schools from several countries, although the needs of the school's communities will always be different and impact the school's policy. The small number of case studies may have impact on the generalisability of the findings. This will be discussed further in the 'Discussion' chapter.

#### Data Collection techniques

In order to assess internal validity and strengthen reliability, data was collected using a variety of techniques:

- Interview of teaching staff individually (Individual needs co-coordinator, a curriculum co-coordinator, and Principal from each school).

- Survey of teaching staff using a questionnaire

- Analysis of the participating schools' gifted and talented policies

- Analysis of the participating schools' parent handbooks/websites

Triangulation of the method was achieved through; the use of interviews, questionnaires and document analysis. Additionally, triangulation of persons was achieved by having discussions with identified staff members at each school, and by asking for opinions and suggestions from the wider teaching staff through

the questionnaire.

## Interviews

### Selecting participants for Interview

I chose an internal sample of teachers from each of the schools to participate in an interview. The Gifted and Talented coordinator (or if there was no Gifted and Talented coordinator – the Head of Individual Needs), the Principal, and a curriculum coordinator were selected.

The focus of the interview with these staff members was to discuss the school's ethos and policy, and to investigate the ways these are represented in the school's practice of identifying and providing for the needs of gifted and talented students. I chose the Principal as the staff member who would be able to discuss the school's ethos in depth.

The Gifted and Talented coordinator was identified for interview as they would be the staff member who would be the most knowledgeable person to discuss identification and provision practices, as well as having the most knowledge of the characteristics of gifted students.

Finally, I chose a curriculum coordinator to interview, as they would be able to describe how gifted students are identified and provided for in their subject areas or what action takes place in the classrooms.

Internal and external validity, and reliability may be difficult to ensure due to the use of semi-structured interviewing as a data collection tool. Before the interviews, participants were given copies of the questions. Bias in the

researcher's questioning and discussion was considered, and participants were given copies of the transcripts to review before analysis and reporting.

#### Interview technique and discussion points (Appendix B)

The interviews of the three staff members were designed to be semi-structured. Wood (2006) asserts that for the research to tap into the depths of the issue and uncover meanings and understandings, the interviews should be semi-structured and reasonably informal.

Questions were presented as discussion points and it is acknowledged that some interviews would go in different directions to others. These open-ended questions may enable the staff member to share their personal opinions, as well as the ethos of the school, and the key ideas of the policy. The interviews were seen as an opportunity to gather a detailed overall picture of how the school makes decisions about their gifted students, and how the policy translates into the classroom.

The discussion points of the interviews included asking for the interviewee's personal opinion about the nature of giftedness and the school's mission statement and how it relates to students with special educational needs. This question was designed to 'open up' ideas as well as to make links between the philosophy of the staff member, the policy of the school, and how these are reflected in practice.

The staff members were then asked to describe in turn how the school identifies gifted students, and provides and evaluates programmes for gifted students, and how these procedures are linked to the school's mission statement and policy. The interviewees were also asked for their opinion of the strengths,

and weaknesses/barriers of the school's approach to identifying and providing for the needs of gifted students. The purpose of these topics was to uncover themes and issues that influence practice in international contexts. It was also the aim of the interviews to identify successful practices.

### The Questionnaire (Appendix C)

In addition to interviews, the whole teaching staff (from the first to the last year of schooling) was asked to participate in a questionnaire delivered through a 'wiki'<sup>1</sup> The questionnaire was designed to collect information from the teaching staff of the school. I wanted to find out about their opinions of gifted and talented education, their prior experiences, and about their opinions of what their school does well to identify and provide for the needs of gifted students. I was also interested in their views of issues, barriers and weaknesses faced by themselves and the school when dealing with these students.

The questions consisted of some quantitative information, i.e. 'how many international schools have you taught in?' and some qualitative questions, such as 'What are your views of gifted and talented students'? The open-ended questions were designed to offer participants an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions in more depth. It was acknowledged that some teachers may 'skip' these questions due to being 'time poor' and wanting to finish the questionnaire quickly.

An anonymous questionnaire was selected as an appropriate data collection tool for several reasons. Firstly, participants would have time answer the

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<sup>1</sup> A 'wiki' is a website whose members can add or modify content. This wiki was created by myself and included information for the participants about the study, and a link to the questionnaire.



survey. They would also have privacy and anonymity to share their opinions without having to be concerned by negative reactions from other staff members as they shared their views on issues and barriers faced by the school. Finally, because of the geographic distance between the researcher and the schools, this questionnaire was an efficient use of time and could be administered electronically, which was more convenient than relying on post, or arranging focus group discussions by post.

### Documentation

The following documentation was provided by each school for analysis:

- The policy for Gifted and Talented students
- Any handbooks or procedural guidelines developed by the school that consider gifted and talented students
- Information that the school provides new parents, particularly about gifted programmes
- The school's website

The purpose of examining this documentation was to identify and analyse the links between the school's ethos, the policy documents, and how these translate into the teachers' practice. It is important to acknowledge that these documents are written for a specific audience and purpose, and that they represent the 'ideal practice' of the school. Woods (2006) contends that the task for the researcher is to find out how such documents were constructed, and how they are used and interpreted, rather taking the documents as face value.

### Analysis of the data (Appendix D)

Transcripts of interviews and responses to surveys were analysed, focusing on themes within responses from each school, using 'pattern matching' and 'explanation building'. Themes were identified based on the objectives of the case studies. These objectives are categorized as: 'Guiding principles', principles and practices for identification, principles and practices for provisions, and enablers and barriers. Stake's (2006) 'Worksheet 2' (pg. 43) template was used to note themes and examples arising for each category, for each school.

Themes that have already been identified from the literature review are culture, English proficiency, mobility of families, staff experience and mobility, and options for provision. Other themes may also arise from the data.

Furthermore, a cross case procedure is appropriate to use to uncover patterns and themes between the schools. Stake's (2006) Matrices 5A and 5B (pg 51 & 59), were used to initially compare themes for each category for each school, and then to generate any possible merged findings.

### Ethical considerations

It is unlikely that this study or its findings will cause harm to participants. A low risk notification from Massey University Human Ethics Committee was obtained and participants were informed of this. There were no minors interviewed in this study. The group of adults interviewed in the study is reasonably small (6 adults); therefore, it was possible to ask for active consent, which was obtained using an information sheet, and signed consent form.

The group of adults completing the survey is much larger, and passive

consent was assumed on return of the completed survey. Questionnaire participants were informed on the wiki homepage that completion implied consent.

The purpose of the study was clearly explained, and participants were given opportunities to ask questions and view drafts of the findings throughout the process, and before submission. It was necessary to ask permission from the principal of each school for me to view their policies and interview their staff.

In the case of this study, gender, nationality and interest may be significant therefore confidentiality could not be completely ensured. The participants' names were changed thus ensuring anonymity. Notes, questionnaires, and interview records will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

The member's only wiki: (<http://giftedaroundtheglobe.wikispaces.com/>) was created so that participants could find copies of interview questions, questionnaires and the information sheet about the study.

### **Summary**

In summary, the design of the multiple case study was aimed firstly to provide a overview of the link between each school's mission statement and policy, and classroom practice. Key areas of interest were documentation provided to parents, and the procedures used to identify and provide for the needs of gifted and talented students. These were discussed using the point of view of the whole staff, as well as three staff members who should be instrumental in transferring the school's policy into practice. Additionally, the policy documentation and documentation provided to parents (i.e. the school

handbook and website) were examined.

Secondly the aim of the research was to identify and compare themes between the school case studies. The aim of this is to generate issues affecting gifted education within the international context, and to formulate assertions that may be useful for international schools when they are considering their policy and education practices for gifted and talented students.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Research findings**

The findings of the questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis have been presented to align with the research objectives of this study. The findings are organized as: guiding principles (school ethos and mission statement, the school's policy document and staff handbook; and staff beliefs about gifted and talented education); principles and practices for identifying special abilities; and providing for the needs of gifted students for each of the two individual case studies. The findings for each case have been summarised by examining the enablers and barriers to implementing the identification procedures and provisions. Each case study begins with an overview of each school's population details, and contextual information, as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below. The overviews also describe the context in more depth and include relevant information about gifted and talented education in the school.

#### **School A**

##### **Overview**

School A is a large well-resourced and well-established school. The school is part of a profit making company that owns 7 other international schools in Asia and Europe, and 30 independent schools in the United Kingdom. Most of the classes are full, with waiting lists for many year groups. On average, there are seven to eight classes per year group. Class size is restricted to 24 students. Given that the student population is 65% Australian and the staff is largely Australian, the school has a strong Australian ethos. Staff turnover is reasonably

low, with the school reporting an average contract length of 5.8 years. The school community is very large, and parents play an active role in school events.

Table 1.

<b>Curriculum:</b>	<b>Roll:</b>	<b>Student population:</b>	<b>Location:</b>	<b>History:</b>	<b>Language:</b>
International Baccalaureate Primary, Middle and Diploma Programmes	2500 students Aged 4-18	40 nationalities (65% Australian)  <b>Staff population:</b> 200 Teaching 16 nationalities	Asia	School has been established for 18 years.  Over this time, the roll has grown from 43 students, to 2500.	The curriculum is delivered in English  English is a widely spoken language of the host country

The school's strategic plan for 2011 focused on developing professional learning in the area of differentiation. The strategies to develop this included the establishment of the role of a gifted and talented support team.

Gifted and talented coordinators (GATC) for the Junior, Primary and Middle sub-schools were appointed at the start of 2011. They are included as part of the school's 'Individual Needs' department. The GATCs have worked for the first year to rewrite the school's policy, develop a staff handbook, and begin the process of identifying students to create a register. Prior to the appointment of the gifted and talented coordinators, gifted students had been identified and

provided for on a case-by case basis, with some support from the Individual Needs team.

#### Documentation and research participants

In order to collect information about the principles that guide this school's decision-making and action, I reviewed the school's policy document, ethos and values and also the 'Gifted and Talented Staff Handbook'. I also aimed to investigate the ways in which the community was informed about the school's practices with gifted students. I did this by examining the information provided to parents via the website, sub school handbooks, 2010 Annual report for parents, and newsletters from 2011.

In order to make links between these guiding principles and the actual pedagogical practices of the staff, I interviewed three staff members: the Head of Middle school; the Gifted and Talented Coordinator; and the Head of Mathematics. I sent a link to the questionnaire via email to all teaching staff. The thirty two questionnaire respondents had between 1 and 26 years experience working in International schools. Respondents also represented all sub-schools and curriculum areas. Five respondents reported that they have studied gifted and talented education at university level. Twelve respondents have taken part in professional development, and four have attended a conference. No respondents reported having no experience whatsoever with gifted and talented students.

Through the questionnaire and interviews, I collected information about the staff members' personal beliefs about gifted education. I made the assumption that individual staff' members' beliefs about gifted education would

also be guiding principles and have influence on their practice, and may not always be identical to the school's set of definitions and values.

### **Guiding Principles**

The school's ethos and values outline their beliefs about what is most important for the students and staff of the school. Notable was the emphasis on the pursuit of excellence as being central to the ethos of the school. The school's values state that the school will strive to create an environment that will encourage individuals to strive for excellence.

Additionally, the school recognizes diversity as one of its core values, celebrating and appreciating uniqueness, similarities and differences. Other values include learning; and the recognition of different learning styles, and connectedness, which emphasises the importance of inclusiveness. Each of these values can be seen as being important to gifted and talented education.

The school policy document was created in 2004 and updated at the beginning of 2011 by the gifted and talented support team. The policy document uses the following definitions;

*Highly able:* A term used by (the school) to describe a student who has demonstrated potential (giftedness), abilities and/or skills (talents) **clearly** beyond their age and year level.

*Exceptional:* A term used by (the school) to describe a student who has demonstrated potential (giftedness), abilities and/or skills (talents) **profoundly** beyond their age and year level.



The policy document recognizes that there are highly able students in their classrooms that require different planning and teaching responses to those of the majority of the year level cohort. The document expresses a commitment to ensuring that the learning needs are addressed. The policy document states a priority on:

*inclusive approaches, flexible responses, multiple identification criteria and personalized support.*

There is no specific detail as to how these priorities may be addressed.

The policy document makes links with the school's values of excellence and diversity and states that learning experiences that meet the needs of the students will be sought within and beyond the school. However, the rationale section of the policy goes on to state that the IB programmes are sufficiently challenging and open ended to meet a wide range of learning needs. Therefore, the needs of high able students will be addressed in the first instance through the implementation of strategies within the classroom.

The Gifted and Talented coordinator (GATC) of the Middle school also reiterated these points when discussing the links between the school's ethos towards different groups of learners, commenting that 'in keeping with our pursuit of excellence and celebrating diversity, we are trying to actively seek out experiences that are targeted to meet the developmental needs of students who have been identified as having highly developed skills and abilities'.

Further to the policy, the Gifted and Talented Coordinators and the Learning and Teaching Committee of the school have developed a 53 page 'Gifted and Talented Staff Handbook'. The 'Gifted and Talented working party' – a group of interested staff members, also had input into the document. I have examined

this document, with a view to highlighting guiding principles taken on by the school. The identification procedure, referral process, and provisions described in the handbook will be discussed further in this chapter.

A key guiding principle for the school, which is included in the handbook is the notion that ‘according to current research, gifted and talented learners represent 10% of the school population’. Furthermore, it suggests that at the school, the percentage is likely to be higher, given the socioeconomic status of the community and the higher levels of education, motivation and achievement amongst the parent community.

The opening statements in the handbook challenge teachers’ preconceived definitions of gifted and talented students, and suggest that it is common for teachers to: believe that everyone possesses gifts, have a negative attitude towards ‘labeling’ a child, and deny the existence of ‘gifted and talented students’. The handbook emphasises the notion of individual personal strengths as an issue of learning needs, rather than value or worth, stating that ‘we do not confuse personal weaknesses with disabilities. Equally, we should not confuse personal strengths with gifts’. The Head of Middle school concurred, describing his belief that giftedness does not imply that the student is more valuable, rather that they have different strengths.

Whilst the term ‘gifted and talented student’ is used on every page of the handbook, the school has chosen to use the term ‘highly able student’ in their policy document, as it is asserted in the handbook that the terms ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ are problematic as they may promote elitism and divisiveness. The handbook does recognize that a student’s potential can manifest in academics, the arts, in sports, or as interpersonal skills. However, on the page

prior to this description is a diagram of an Intelligence Quotient bell curve with the caption 'Gifted children fall within the right hand section grid beginning with a score of 115'.

Finally, the handbook includes a more detailed description of the characteristics of highly able students, including some useful age specific characteristics for teachers to refer to.

The beliefs of the staff about gifted and talented students will act as additional guiding principles that influence their classroom practice. Of the 32 staff who responded to the questionnaire, 100% believed that they have taught gifted students in their classrooms. The questionnaire asked the teachers to write about their beliefs about gifted and talented students. Five respondents acknowledged that giftedness can manifest in a range of areas, such as the teacher who noted that 'the term should cover a range of areas, not just 'Maths'. It can apply to students who are G&T across many academic, arts, sports areas, or who maybe GT in only one specific area'.

Another theme that arose from the question about the teachers' personal beliefs reinforced the handbook's statement that giftedness is a special educational need. All but one respondent described their belief that gifted students should be 'catered for'. One teacher asserted, 'they need to be provided with an appropriate level of challenge and extension. They shouldn't be given more work, but what they are currently studying should be enhanced to provide them with a challenge'.

Similarly, the GATC coordinator described his belief that students are all unique and that we must cater for students who have gifts, stating that 'maybe lots of students have gifts but we have to bring out the talents by creating

environmental situations via teaching methods, the classroom environment....Unless different catalysts are in place or different things are implemented, their abilities may just lay dormant, or they may underachieve'.

This notion was echoed by several teachers' questionnaire responses, as they hold the belief that 'Many G & T students are underachievers due to a lack of motivation', and that: 'Many teachers do not understand the implications of having G & T students in their classes e.g. the rate at which they learn, the need not to have things repeated etc. Giftedness can cause underachievement'.

The Head of Mathematics at the school has used his personal experience as a highly able student at school to develop his beliefs about teaching them. He believes that it is important to make sure that students know they are exceptional, rather than holding an assumption that what they are able to do is 'normal'.

One teacher held the belief that 'I think the term is grossly over used and abused. There are a lot of misconceptions about the terms. I believe there needs to be empirical evidence for a student to be classified as gifted and talented, such as ed psych reports and assessments'.

The Head of Middle school commented that;

Given our (teachers') egalitarian nature, there is still a reluctance on the part of staff to accept that there are students who are gifted and that these students need special provisions. The term 'gifted and talented' itself polarises staff and is often rejected. Many staff still do not understand that some level of differentiation may not be enough for these students. There is also minimal understanding of the social and emotional needs of gifted students or of the concept of the gifted 'over

excitabilities' and how these can present in gifted students.

Both the GATC, and the Head of Mathematics also described a frustration at teachers' resistance to 'labeling' a student as being exceptional, noting that 'I think it all comes down to the tall poppy syndrome where you can have the gifted athlete who's adored by all, but you get a top performing student in the school environment and we have to celebrate them too'.

### Principles and practices for identification

The staff handbook describes the identification and referral process as 'an ongoing cycle of investigation, monitoring and review aimed at identifying the needs of a highly able student'. As stressed in the handbook, it is expected that there will be at least 10% of students in each cohort that will be identified as being highly able.

The GATC discussed the identification process, which is also included in the handbook. Students can be identified on enrolment by the registrar as they review records sent from previous schools. Evidence from the parents presented directly to the registrar, the Individual Needs department or the class teacher is also examined by the GATC. From there, the information is presented to the class teacher who initiates further investigation based on observation.

If the student is not new to the school, the classroom teachers are responsible for identification in the first instance. Once they have initiated a referral process, they will fill in a referral form. The parents will be notified and asked to fill in a checklist.

There is a teacher referral form and parent checklist for Preschool and Junior school students, and a separate form for Primary and Middle school

students. These referral forms have been developed by the GATCs. They differ to represent the characteristics of 'young gifted children', and 'gifted children'.

The teacher referral form for Preschool and Junior school students requires the teachers to indicate and provide examples of the child's behaviour within a set of characteristics, of which there are fifteen. A few of these are: alertness, advanced play behaviour, exceptional memory, early reading and speech, imagination, and social and emotional maturity. The parent checklist uses a 0-10 rating scale against 15 characteristics, each of which include a descriptor, for example: 'My child shows intense curiosity and deeper knowledge than other children: He/she has an insatiable need to know and explore; later on he or she collects things and then learns all he or she can about them; remembers things in great detail'.

The Primary and Middle school teacher referral form requires that teachers indicate and provide examples of 15 characteristics. Positive and negative indicators of each characteristic are bullet pointed. For example; 'Abstract thinker; Positive: makes generalizations, test out ideas. Negative: questions others, questions authority'. The parent referral form also uses a 0-10 rating scale against 10 characteristics, with examples of each provided for parents to review. The GATC acknowledged that it is a lengthy document for teachers to fill in, and described how the forms are often filled in during a discussion between himself and the teacher to make them less onerous.

Once the teacher and parent forms have been completed, the GATC will look for further evidence. This can be in the form of the 'iAchieve Online Placement Instrument', developed by the Australian Council of Educational research (ACER, 2007). The GATC coordinator described its value as an

identification tool, particularly for Mathematics and English, saying 'you can above level and below level test and there's no ceiling, you can keep testing them until you reach the year level they're working at'. The school also uses results from the Australian Progressive Achievement tests (PAT) (ACER, 2008), National Assessment Programme – Numeracy and Literacy (NAPLAN) (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011), and the New South Wales International Competitions and Assessments for Schools (ICAS) (University of New South Wales, 2010). Every student in the school undertakes each of these assessments. Results are monitored for high performers, particularly the students who may not yet have been identified as being highly able in class - indicating possible underachievement.

Finally – all of the evidence is collated and the GATC meets with the teacher and parents to discuss possible ideas for provision.

In the Senior school, there is not a Gifted and Talented coordinator and no teacher or parent referral forms. The Head of Mathematics of the school described identification of students for the extended Mathematics courses in Years 9 and 10 as through self nomination or teacher referral, which is then justified by the student's results on tests. He added that 'we are looking for kids who can have a bit of virtuosity in their ability to think mathematically rather than kids who can just do things on paper. That's one of the hard things; you get a lot of kids who score highly on tests but they can't think about the maths or explain it'. Entry to extension English and Languages courses at Senior school level is also through teacher referral and at the discretion of the Head of Department.

### Perceived strengths and weaknesses of the identification procedures:

Teachers held beliefs about the strengths of the identification procedures used by the school. One teacher commented that it was a positive that gifted students were identified by subject teachers and also by using competition results. Another teacher noted that it was a strength that the school even acknowledged that there were gifted students. The extension courses in the upper Middle school were considered to be positive by two teachers, one of whom responded that 'in the senior years, students are offered the option of choosing 'Standard' or "advanced' subjects, and "extension" subjects for those who are very keen. The selection process is partly self-selection (i.e. students choose to be in particular subjects) but there is advice and recommendations provided by teachers and subject co-coordinators. This seems to work well in most cases'. It is worth noting that two level courses for Language B (the second language of study) and Mathematics are obligatory for schools using the Middle Years Programme of the International Baccalaureate.

The notion that students may miss out on being identified in the Middle and Senior school because they have many teachers rather than just one class teacher was mentioned by three teachers, one of whom stated that: 'Some gifted students do not get noticed as subject teachers don't know them well enough'.

One teacher noted that there seems to be an emphasis on the use of test results to identify gifted students, commenting that 'School relies on teacher nomination based on diagnostic testing in subject areas. Achievement tests are also used (NAPLAN, PAT). Students with special needs may be overlooked'.

Additionally, one teacher who responded raised the theme of time and resourcing: 'my school does not have the enough qualified staff or resources to



cater to such students’.

The GATC described the ways in identification procedures can be difficult when students can sometimes mask their abilities, or have behavioural problems, as teachers are less likely to feel positive about their abilities. The Head of Middle school also mentioned that as adolescents start in a new school, they are ‘very keen to fit in socially, and build relationships with the other students’, and that they do not consider standing out from the crowd to be a successful strategy. Similarly, a teacher noted that ‘there is a possible stigma of being gifted in this student body’.

To draw teachers’ attention to these barriers, the handbook included a section on ‘Underachievement factors’. These include the ‘forced choice dilemma’. Whilst the handbook does not describe what a ‘forced choice dilemma’, means – or some possible characteristics of students experiencing this, it does recommend ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ for working with these students. Another ‘underachievement factor’ included in the handbook and already discussed by one of the teachers in the questionnaire is an undiagnosed or diagnosed specific learning disability, which may mask characteristics of highly able students.

Because the school’s Gifted and Talented Handbook for Teachers was very new at the time of the study, and the fact the Gifted and Talented Coordinators had not long been appointed, several teachers’ feedback in the questionnaire indicated that they were not familiar with the identification procedures. Likewise, none of the school’s publications for parents (The sub-school parent handbooks, the annual report for parents and school newsletter) included any information about the school’s approach to gifted and talented education. The details for the Gifted and Talented coordinators or the Head of

Individual needs (learning support) were not included in the contact details section of the handbooks.

The GATCs and the Middle Years Programme Coordinator did undertake a parent information session, which was attended by 70 parents. The purpose of this was to inform parents that a gifted and talented department had been created, and of the identification/referral process.

### **Principles and practices for provision**

One of the principles for provision strongly stated by the handbook is that 'helping individual students is not an option over and above the curriculum, it is a professional obligation that will likely cause changes to our pedagogy and practice'. The handbook lists 'guiding principles for differentiation for the highly able student'. These principles include stressing the use of higher level thinking skills, complex content, creativity and excellence in performance and products.

There are two 'levels of support' available for teachers from the GATC listed in the handbook: indirect support, whereby the GATC supports student differentiation through teacher training, resourcing and informal consultation. Secondly, is 'direct support' which entails the GATC providing learning experiences for the student within or outside of the classroom. The handbook goes on to list, but not detail, many options that teachers could implement for in-class differentiation. These include the modification of content, process and product, creating flexible learning environments, and evaluating strategies for differentiation using reflective questioning. The coordinators also release a monthly newsletter for staff called 'Out of the Box'. The newsletter includes links to articles, and websites as well as teaching tips, and ideas for identification.

To encourage the use of the handbook's advice to class teachers about differentiation, the GATC describes how his main goal is to get into classrooms to build relationships with students and teachers and to work within the classroom the majority of this time. He reports that the team of coordinators from the three sub schools has been working in class to support teachers with differentiation across the second half of this year.

Both the GATC and the Head of Mathematics discussed the option of mentorships as being an appropriate provision for highly able students. The GATC noted that some students' learning styles require one-on-one work with a mentor. He discussed the option of bringing mentors in from the community, but because of his unfamiliarity with the city, at this stage he has relied on teachers from the school to act as mentors. He aims to find mentors that would be able to support students from a range of domains, rather than just Mathematics and English. At the time of the study, one student had been introduced to a mentor to develop creative writing skills.

The Head of Mathematics, who comes from a Senior school perspective, emphasized the value of mentorships and described 'the value added when one person really gets in tune with an individual and can really point them to things'. He suggested that every staff member should be assigned as a mentor to a student, and that this system should be 'formalised and centralised and one person should be in charge of it'.

The school has used competitions for some years as a form of enrichment for gifted students. The school enters groups of students into primarily Australian competitions. This year the GATC has withdrawn some students from mathematics lessons to take part in 'Mathematics Olympiad' and 'Future

Problem Solving' competitions. The Head of Mathematics also runs a co curricular activity for an additional Australian Mathematics competition, and a South East Asian Mathematics Competition for upper Middle school and Senior school students.

Options for provision that have yet to be put into place are the use of Individualised Learning Programmes, which, the GATC says, will enable the classroom teacher to follow 'specific guidelines that would be in alignment with what's being taught in the classroom'. At this stage, the focus would be on Mathematics or English. The GATC acknowledged that students may be gifted in areas other than Mathematics and English, and envisioned that in the future complete individualized programmes could be implemented. He emphasised the point that the creation of provisions of this type would be in line with the needs of the individual, but also discussed the possibility of withdrawing groups whereby like-minded students within the school could work together.

The school has never explored acceleration of highly able students as an option before, however it is seen by the GATC as a vital part of the new programme. He believes that students working at least two years above their age level in a particular subject should be considered as cases for acceleration in that subject. He suggests that it 'takes into consideration the child and their parents and teachers, and that we need an agreement between all parties'. He goes on to note that the teachers, students and Head of Department would need to develop an understanding of the educational rationale behind acceleration and be accepting of it. Since my interview with the GATC, one student has been given approval to be accelerated from a Year 5 to a Year 7 Mathematics class.

### Perceived strengths and weaknesses of the provisions

The staff identified many strengths of the provisions that are currently in place for highly able students. A common theme arising through the questionnaire were that staff feel that they are improving at being able to differentiate for students. The Head of Middle school concurred, stating that: 'the level of differentiation in classrooms is certainly improving as we have begun to use more individualised formative assessments. These have certainly made teachers more aware of the varying ability levels'.

Whilst the curriculum is not a provision aimed at gifted and talented students, teachers saw the inclusive ethos and inquiry based approach of the International Baccalaureate programmes as being advantageous for these students.

The Head of Mathematics believes that the competitions used as enrichment opportunities for gifted and talented mathematicians at the school are 'great for kids who are really passionate about maths. They have fun. They've tried things out with a group of like-minded kids, so there's that social acceptance as well'.

The GATC identified his work within classrooms as both a strength and weakness. He stressed the need for the GATC and the class teacher to have a good relationship in order to team-teach effectively. He also identified that working within the class may send a message that other students may perceive as elitist, such as 'Mrs. X works with the low level kids and Mr. A works with the high level kids', and this message gets through to parents who ring up and ask 'why is that child given assistance and my child isn't?'

Three staff expressed a concern that there are still not enough out-of-class opportunities for gifted and talented students, with the comments that there are 'minimal opportunities (competitions & 'ability groupings') for students to 'problem solve' in some subject areas', and that 'right now, the extent of acceleration, curriculum compacting, mentoring, enrichment and withdrawal etc that is employed, is negligible'. One staff member also saw in-class differentiation as a challenging issue, stating that: 'Teachers are expected to provide opportunities for extension within their classes - 'differentiated learning' is the key term these days. Teachers have to cope with great extremes - high learning support needs to exceptionally gifted'.

While Senior school students do have access to extension level classes, one staff member perceived a weakness that the extension classes are often run at a lunchtime, which 'seems unfair and difficult for both students and staff'.

### **Enablers and barriers to implementing the identification procedures and provisions**

Five teachers identified time and resourcing as being barriers to effectively providing for the needs of highly able students. One teacher held the belief that 'more need for learning support students means there has not been any focus on G & T. To be honest, that is where I would rather see the funding anyway!'. The GATC also identified time as being problematic given that ideally he would like to work with teachers in classrooms, and that there are 29 Middle school homerooms means that it is virtually impossible for him to spend meaningful amounts of time with each group. The Head of Mathematics agrees that 'linking the students up with people, getting resourcing available for Senior

school kids to go to, having a more individualized approach' is hindered by a lack of time and resourcing for teachers.

Another logistical issue that staff saw as a barrier for Middle and Senior school students is timetabling. Three teachers and the Head of Mathematics mentioned timetabling as being restrictive of acceleration options, as classes run at different times in different year groups, including different lunchtimes for the Senior school students. Timetabling was also seen as restricting specialist teachers in the creative arts and physical education departments from being able to see different groups of students more than once a week.

Teacher attitudes were seen by some as barriers with the words 'cynicism', 'resistance' and 'mindset' mentioned five times in questionnaire responses. It was also noted that teachers lack the expertise and knowledge to identify students who may be gifted.

Issues and barriers related specifically to the international context of the school were identified as 'Expat' parent attitudes, turnover of staff and students, students who have English as a second language, and cultural backgrounds.

Parent attitudes were described as having an impact on the success of the identification of and provision for highly able students. One teacher suggested that 'there is a lack of understanding of G & T students' needs. Expat parents are usually 'high fliers' who think their offspring will have their same drive & motivation to succeed'. Likewise, another teacher mentioned that 'parental expectations are often that their child/ren are GT when in fact they aren't - they may be pretty good, but....'.

Three staff members mentioned 'mobility' or 'turnover' of staff and

students as being problematic. One staff member saw high student mobility as being a barrier to 'tracking' and identifying students. Another noted that: 'Often international students have changed school systems so often, there are 'holes' in their learning'. Furthermore, the idea was raised that students who have recently joined the school are often 'easily manageable, they keep their heads down and don't make waves and they can slip through the system'.

The only staff member to mention the issue of English being a second language for some students, as well as cultural implications, was the Head of Mathematics. He described a student who was required to write a reflection, as well as hand in the mathematical results to an investigation, and what it was like for her to 'work out the terms and translate them from Korean into English and come up with explanations that make good sense'. He also noted that 'kids might be really able and they never get to display that because of the language barrier'. Furthermore, he explained the problems he faces when students come from countries where the education systems work at much higher levels of content than the school's curriculum covers. 'Does this mean they're really gifted? Would they be gifted in Korea? It does in our context I guess, and they're so far ahead that the challenge is, to do something meaningful with them, that's not wasting their time'.

There are also many enablers in the school context that are of benefit to the implementation of the principles and practices. The creation of the gifted and talented department shows a commitment on behalf of the school leadership to improve practice with gifted students. Likewise the GATCs have worked very hard to create a comprehensive handbook, and begin their work in classrooms and with small groups of students.



While several staff members have noted some resistance of some to the notion of 'gifted and talented' students, the Head of Middle school believes that the greatest enabler is the overall quality of the staff. He stated that 'I think that many international schools are able to attract a high quality of staff because we offer very good working conditions. We have a lot of PD at this school as well. Staff members here are generally 'into' their teaching and are committed to improve and develop. There are high expectations from the leadership, but also from the parent community as well'.

## **School B**

### Overview

School B had been in operation for 18 months at the time of the study. It is also a profit making school, and part of a company group of schools. School B operates on an August to June calendar, and is targeted at the North American community of the country. The school runs preschool class through to Grade 8 classes. There are plans to open a Grade 9 class in 2012. The school uses the state curriculum for Virginia, adapted to suit their international context. The school has applied for authorization to use the International Baccalaureate Primary and Middle Years Programme.

The school has a Learning Support Department. It aims to offer effective professional development, student support within the mainstream classroom, provide interventions and monitor achievement. Gifted and talented students are also the responsibility of this department. Given that this is a very new school, there is not a policy specifically for the education of gifted and talented students.

Table 2

<b>Curriculum:</b>	<b>Roll:</b>	<b>Student population:</b>	<b>Location:</b>	<b>History:</b>	<b>Language:</b>
School's own curriculum based on 'North American and International Curricula' International Baccalaureate candidate schools (waiting for authorization to implement the International baccalaureate programmes)	290 students Aged 2-14	35 nationalities (40% Nth American)  <b>Staff population:</b> 17 class teachers and 15 specialist subject teachers.10 nationalities.	Asia	The school has been established for 18 months	Curriculum delivered in English English is the first language of the country

Documentation and participants

In order to find out about the guiding principles for practice I examined the school's philosophy statement, the Learning Support Department Handbook, the Parent Handbook and the School Website.

I conducted interviews with the School Principal, and Middle school/Mathematics and Science coordinator, and the Head of Learning Support .

I invited the teaching staff to complete the questionnaire . Of the fifteen classroom teachers from the Nursery class to Grade 7, nine teachers responded to the questionnaire. The international experience of these teachers ranged from 1-11 years. Two thirds of the teachers felt that they had experience in gifted and talented education. Four had gifted students in their class at some time. Three participants had undertaken undergraduate level study. One staff member had taken part in in-school professional development in gifted education.

Collectively, these sources enabled me to gather information about staff beliefs about gifted and talented education, identification procedures and provisions taking place in the school, and the staff's opinions of these.

### **Guiding Principles**

The philosophy statement of School B has an emphasis on the notion of inclusivity. This was reinforced during the interviews with the Principal and the Head of Learning Support (HLS), who both described their enrolments policy as being inclusive for all students except for very extreme special needs cases. This 'open to all' attitude, they felt, reflected an inclusive American ethos.

In the Parent handbook and the Principal's address on the school website, there is numerous mention of 'the individual child'. These documents describe how the school's philosophy is to support each individual to reach their full potential. The website describes the school's 'Guiding Statements' which support their philosophy.

There are several guiding statements that have relevance to gifted and talented education. These include the aim to: maintain high standards of performance and achievement including preparation for universities, address a

variety of learning needs - including special education, recruit leading teachers from around the world; and the aim to celebrate diversity.

Also included in the philosophy and guiding statements of the school are the aims to promote life long learning, critical thinking, and compassionate internationally minded citizens. The school's aim for their curriculum, described in the parent handbook is to facilitate a student centered programme of instruction, challenging and collaborative coursework and 'worldly exposure' – such as excursions and camps.

At the time of the study, the school had not devised its definition of 'giftedness and talent', nor had it written a specific policy for gifted education.

One staff member held the belief that 'gifted children are very good at certain subjects, skills,... but are not consistent and talented are more balanced'. Other teachers commented that gifted children like to be challenged, and that they should be provided with opportunities to 'learn all they can'. Another teacher believed that they had had many talented students and a 'handful of very gifted kids'.

The HLS holds the philosophy that students should be looked upon as individuals. She fears that students 'labeled' as gifted could be pigeon holed by others' expectations of them. She prefers to avoid this, and a sense of elitism by including all students in the classroom, and describing all special needs as 'Learning support'.

The Principal also discussed his belief that schools should cater for individual needs. He thinks that gifted education is an area that is often misunderstood by teachers and parents, and that schools need to have clear

definitions of the terms. He also acknowledged that within any cohort there would be a percentage of gifted students.

The Middle school coordinator, who is also responsible for Mathematics and Sciences, described his own understanding that the socio-emotional, as well as the academic needs of gifted students should be considered, as 'in some cases, along with a gift or talent come other concerns'.

### **Principles and practices for identification**

Discussion with the HLS and review of the Learning support Department handbook revealed that the school implements 'data driven decision making' in its practice with 'learning support' students. This data comes primarily from three standardized assessment tasks, which are carried out by all students from Grade 2 to 8 on enrolment, and at the beginning and end of each year. The Diagnostic Online Reading/Mathematics assessment (Let's Go Learn, 2011) enables the school to give each student an 'age level' in several categories, i.e. vocabulary, comprehension, decoding. A school newsletter for parents described these online assessments and made note of the fact that over 60% and 58% of students scored in the highest levels for their age groups for all categories in English and Mathematics, respectively. The school also uses the Otis Lennon Diagnostic Assessment for all students (Pearson, 2009), which measures abstract thinking and reasoning skills. This assessment is commonly used in the United States as a diagnostic tool for gifted students. Any students who perform very well in these assessments could be referred to the Child Study Team in the Learning Support department.

Information about a student's strengths or any exceptional abilities may also come from the child's parents on enrolment or teacher observation. The teacher is able to use these observations and the results of classroom assessment to fill in a referral form for the Child Study Team (CST). This form (for use with any learning support issue) asks teachers to state areas of concern, areas of strength and results of interventions already trialed. The form was designed by the Learning support department.

#### Perceived strengths and weaknesses of identification practices

The results of the questionnaire revealed some mixed responses from teachers about the strengths and weaknesses of the identification procedures. Of the five responses, four teachers did not believe that the school identifies gifted and talented learners. One teacher stated that a strength is that 'there are procedures that teachers and admin has to follow. For example, they must assess the student and observe their learning'.

The school uses many standardised assessments as a tool to identify students performing above or below the age norms. The Middle school coordinator sees a reliance on 'snapshot' data from tests as a weakness of the identification process. The HLS identified a problem that some students, particularly students who speak English as an additional language, perform lower on the tests than expected by the class teacher. The response to this problem has been to reassess the students mid-year to see the level of progress and then provide any extra interventions if required.

Both the Middle school coordinator and the Principal identified staff expertise as a possible weakness of the identification process. The Middle school coordinator commented that '..in recognising a child that's proficient and doing

well versus a child that's actually talented or gifted – I don't think we have a lot of teachers who would be able to delineate that very often'.

### **Principles and practices for provision**

The school has adopted a 'three tiered model' of support for students who have learning needs, including gifted and talented students. This model is based on the 'Responses to Intervention' pyramid (Fox, Carta, Dunlap, Strain & Hemmeter, 2009). Tier one is called 'Core instructional Intervention'. This describes targeted teaching approaches and modifications to learning experiences for students in the mainstream class.

Tier two - 'Targeted Group Interventions' describes small group work either within the class, or as a short-term withdrawal activity. Students would only move to Tier two if the online assessments show that they are not making sufficient progress with Tier one interventions. The Child Study Team undertakes this decision and responsibility for Tier two programme planning.

The Third tier would be for students who require Individualized Education Programs. Students requiring Tier three services should already have been identified at enrolment. At the time of this study, the school did not have any gifted students operating at Tier two or three.

With the school's focus on inclusivity, it was expected that the needs of gifted students will be met by in-class differentiation. It is primarily the role of the classroom teacher to differentiate learning experiences for gifted and talented students. The Learning Support department may support the teachers. The HLS explained this decision further, commenting that 'when we pull kids out one by one I dramatically reduce my ability to help more kids..as we grow and

we have more kids – to pull out small groups would make more sense – I could pull out or work with the groups in the class’.

The HLS described how she is currently supporting a teacher who had students in her class working on accelerated mathematics units. The HLS was locating and ordering resources and helping the teacher to create ‘menus for differentiation’ – which were some project based activities.

The Middle school coordinator also described a provision undertaken by the school to support a student who is gifted in Mathematics. The Child Study team identified that differentiating content in class didn’t seem to be sufficient for his needs, and worked with the family and child to devise an intervention. A specialist learning support teacher then came into class two lessons per week to work with either the whole class or with the individual student on a project created by the Middle school coordinator. The Middle school coordinator regularly ‘checked in’ with the student to see how challenged and engaged he was feeling.

In future, the Principal plans to extend the range of provisions available for gifted students, including linking with universities, and inviting people in from the community to work as mentors.

#### Perceived strengths and weaknesses of provisions

Teachers saw the collaborative support of the Learning support department as a strength: ‘there will always be someone to help the teacher’, and ‘we get strategies and examples of what we can do to help the students’, were two comments made.

One teacher however, noted that there is only one learning support teacher – for both the low and high end of the academic scale, which means that



the responsibility for meeting the needs of gifted students falls mainly on the class teacher.

Two teachers and the HLS also saw the use of strategies for differentiation as positive. The Middle school coordinator described his view that differentiation in class, particularly of the previously described measures he put in place with the mathematics student, is the ideal scenario, commenting that 'everyone's on the same page (parents, teacher and students) and feel like they have had a say and there's relationship building and positive communication'.

The HLS also described how she was able to use the online assessment tools to evaluate the success of the differentiation; commenting 'if we're seeing progress then they don't need learning support because teachers are able to do what needs to be done.'

Equally, the Middle school coordinator acknowledged that a possible weakness of the use of differentiation in class as the primary provision is that the workload can be burdensome: 'If you're planning for different levels in your class and then also for one individual person and then add on any EAL planning and that sort of thing in a class, and all of a sudden it becomes pretty sophisticated'.

### **Enablers and barriers to implementing the identification procedures and provisions**

One of the barriers to moving forward with the identification of and provision for gifted and talented students identified by staff through the questionnaire and interviews is the lack of a clear set of definitions and policy. As noted previously by the Principal and Middle school coordinator; a definition of the terms is important for the whole staff to have a shared set of

understandings of what gifted students 'look like', and what appropriate provisions will be undertaken by the school to meet their needs.

The teachers' ability to effectively differentiate for gifted students was also raised as a possible barrier by the Principal, who commented that: 'the tendency is still to teach to the middle and we don't necessarily cater to individuals. There is a degree of understanding of differentiation..lots of teachers can talk about it, but there's not too many that will transfer it into their practice'.

This was echoed by the HLS who noted that it was her belief that teachers who had worked for many years in international schools were less able to effectively differentiate than Australian or American teachers. She believes that this is due to the fact the International school students are often quite homogenous in terms of ability and socio-economic background and suggested that International school teachers do not often have to deal with students who have high behavioural or academic needs.

The Principal viewed the transience of the community as a barrier, explaining that it can be frustrating for staff when they spend time and energy setting up programmes for students who may exit soon after the programme is finally established. He aims to encourage staff to have more structures and processes in place for when 'the next student comes along'.

Three staff members and the Principal identified a lack of resources and time as a barrier. The teachers felt that the level of differentiation that was expected to be planned created a high workload in terms of written planning, and also in terms of managing the actual lessons. It was also noted that there were 'only a couple of books' as resources. This teacher did acknowledge that the

Learning Support department was helpful in locating extra resources. The Principal noted that as the school was starting up, it was important to manage resource acquisition in a strategic and thoughtful way, and that this was a challenge for them as they grew.

A factor that staff mentioned as an enabler to identification procedures and provisions links to the school's ethos of looking at students as individuals. Three staff members mentioned that the school is trying to address and work towards meeting individual students' needs, and feel that they are making good progress.

### **Summary**

The research findings indicate some commonalities across both schools. Issues raised include; the schools' definitions of giftedness, and staff beliefs and attitudes. Issues raised surrounding the effectiveness of identification procedures, and the schools' choice of provisions also show some common themes, with which we can make possible links to the International context. These issues will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter with reference to some relevant current literature.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

In order to discuss the findings of the research and make links with the literature, this chapter discusses the results from both schools in relation to the research themes. These themes describe the issues that were evident in the schools, and may have implications for other international schools. Recommendations for gifted and talented education in international schools are discussed in the latter half of this chapter. The limitations of this study are also identified and discussed. Finally, this study has raised several areas for further investigation, and these will be described.

#### **Guiding Principles**

##### *Defining 'gifted and talented' students in the school*

There are numerous definitions of 'gifted and talented' students throughout the literature and it is recommended that schools devise their own definition of these terms that reflect the context of the school and its community (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2000; Riley, Bevan-Brown, Bicknell, Carroll-Lind & Kearney, 2004).

In Schools A and B, both staff and documentation acknowledged that they had gifted students in their classrooms, and that giftedness was considered to be a educational need that requires special provision in order for individuals to reach their potential. This was clearly stated by the Gifted and talented coordinator(GATC) and in the staff handbook and policy of School A. Giftedness

was described as an 'individual need' by the Head of Learning Support (HLS) and Principal of School B.

*Using a broad definition*

When defining the terms 'gifted and talented', it is important to consider exceptional abilities in a range of disciplines such as the arts, sports, musical leadership and social skills as well as the traditional academic subjects (Gagné, 2003; Gardner, 1996; Renzulli, 1978). School A's definition of a 'Highly able' student describes exceptional abilities and skills, but does not specify in which areas. The impression that giftedness is associated with academic success or, the traditional notion of intelligence, is given due to the diagram of a bell-curve diagram of Intelligence Quotient scores, shown close to the definition on the handbook page.

At School A one teacher out of thirty-two described that giftedness can manifest across a range of domains. As mentioned in the 'research findings' chapter, School A's handbook included a short reference (1 page out of 53) to 'non academic domains'. Other than that, gifts or talents in domains other than the intellectual domain were not raised. This apparent lack of emphasis has implications for a range of students in international schools.

Harris et al. (2007) contend that in order to be inclusive of students from diverse cultures, schools should consider a broad concept of giftedness. International schools typically have a diverse student population; therefore it is especially appropriate to consider a multicultural perspective of giftedness for children with non-English speaking backgrounds (Reis & Small, 2005). As found by Ford (2003), IQ or test driven definitions of giftedness often ignore the strengths of culturally and or linguistically diverse students.

*Staff beliefs about the nature of giftedness and attitudes towards the notion of giftedness.*

School A had made the decision to use the term 'Highly able' instead of 'gifted and talented' in their policy document and in parts of their handbook. The rationale behind this was the assumption made in the handbook that teachers find the term 'elitist' and feel resistant to the idea of 'labeling' students. McCoach and Siegle (2007) discussed this notion, suggesting that 'Fears of elitism cause many educators to view gifted education as involving special privileges for the "already advantaged', (pg. 246). Negative teacher attitudes were a concern of the GATC and the Head of Middle School, however, the staff's beliefs about defining giftedness revealed only one 'negative' statement: 'I think the term is grossly over used and abused. There are a lot of misconceptions about the 'terms''. This statement supports the contention that staff should develop and share an understanding of the terms.

The majority of comments made by the GATC and the staff at School A showed a range of understandings about 'giftedness and talent' that is in alignment with current research. For example, the GATC used and described the term 'catalysts' which are a reference to the theories of Gagné. Another teacher stated her belief that gifted students need a different quality of work, rather than a larger amount, which reflects Tomlinson's (2000) concept of 'respectful work' rather than 'busywork'.

The HLS of School B expressed a concern about 'labeling' students, preferring to focus instead on individual needs. This school has not developed a definition for the terms 'gifted and talented'. This was reflected in some of the

teachers' comments that they have taught lots of talented students, but only a few gifted, and that 'talented students are more balanced than gifted students'. A lower percentage of teachers from this school noted having had experience with gifted and talented students, including professional development opportunities.

Barker (2008, in Fraser & McGee, 2008) discusses the ways in which teachers' beliefs influence practice and contends that teachers use their understandings of theory to create personal goals for practice. This implies that a school should strive to ensure that teachers have a thorough and shared understanding of the ways 'giftedness' is described and represented in their context. These definitions should also be informed by current theory. Professional development of staff understandings should aim to align the school and theoretical definitions of giftedness and talent with identification data, planning and classroom practice.

#### *Prevalence of gifted and talented students in international schools*

Staff in both schools raised the issue of the high prevalence of gifted and talented students in international schools. This should be considered when international schools devise definitions that suit their school context. Sternberg (1993) contends that for an individual to be considered gifted, they must 'possess a high level of an attribute that is rare relative to their peers'. More specifically, Gagné(2003) suggests that gifts are considered to be natural attributes in at least one domain that places an individual in the top ten percent of their age peers. The handbook of School A and the HLS of School B both noted that the socio economic backgrounds, high levels of education, motivation and

expectation of 'expat' families may mean that there are higher numbers of gifted students than may be found in a domestic classroom.

Results of standardised tests in international schools are skewed towards the higher end of scores. This could imply that the 'top 10%' of performers are better taken from the cohort information of the school, rather than national statistical averages. However, if many students are showing potential much greater than that of their peers in domestic schools, international schools also must have a responsibility to meet these students' needs.

#### Policies for gifted and talented education

There is no requirement that international schools have a policy for gifted and talented education. Much research however, suggests that a policy document that: links with the school's philosophy, includes a definition of terms, and from which identification procedures and provision can be planned is important (Cathcart, 2005; McAlpine, 2004, New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2000). In order to reflect the needs of the community, and to create a shared understanding amongst staff, the policy ideally should be created collaboratively. The high mobility of staff and students in an International school context also implies that the school leadership should ensure that the policy is introduced to all new staff and reviewed on a regular basis.

While School B is new, and does not yet have a policy for gifted education, School A has reviewed its policy three times since its creation in 2001. Although it is not available to parents, it has been reviewed by a number of groups of staff, including a 'Gifted and Talented working party' and the newly appointed GATCs, which means that its creation has involved discussion including a number of



persons. Cathcart (2005) recommends alongside listing aims, a policy for gifted and talented education should specifically state planned provisions and procedures. Harris et al. (2007) also suggest that the policy document for a school that has a diverse cultural population should also include a statement that details how identification of students from diverse cultures will be made.

While School A's policy does not include these details, the handbook does recommend a range of strategies for differentiation and tools used to identify all students. Neither document makes any acknowledgement of the range of cultures in the school. Both schools also emphasised the importance of being flexible in order to respond to the needs of the individual student. It is important to note however, that while provisions may be offered to suit an individual, in order to improve student achievement, they should still be informed by valid data from clear identification procedures and be substantiated by current research.

### **Identification**

Identifying children who may possess natural aptitudes or talents is a key issue in gifted education, causing much discussion amongst professionals (Pfeiffer, 2003, Riley et al., 2004). Current research findings imply that difficulties in identification in international schools may lie in the ineffectiveness of standardised testing on diverse cultural populations and English language learners (Bernal, 2002; Cohen, 1990; Pfeiffer, 2003; Reis & Small, 2005), as well as in our evolving understanding of the multifaceted nature of 'giftedness'. When considering this it is obvious to educators that strategies and tools to identify gifted learners should reflect this and be of a wide range, flexible and consider a

range of domains such as socioaffective and creative gifts (Feldhuson, 2001; Gagné, 1995; NSW Department of Education 2005).

### Procedures for identification

Procedures for identifying gifted and talented students at both schools included the use of formal standardised test results, teacher observation and referral, and parent nomination at enrolment, or through the parent referral form.

Standardised assessments: School A uses Australian standardised tools, which are undertaken by the whole cohort, and states that from this data, high performers can be identified. There was no 'cutoff', rather results that were in the highest bracket of scores were considered. Likewise, School B follows the same key procedure except that they use American standardised assessments. From this information, two key issues are raised: the effectiveness of formal assessments to show gifted characteristics, and the tension between inclusivity and the use of culturally biased assessment tools that have been standardized against national norms.

### *The effectiveness of standardised tests to identify students*

The use of standardised testing to identify gifted students was perceived by both schools as appropriate due to the quantitative and 'reliable' nature of the information gathered. School B used the phrase 'data driven decision making'. Much research suggests that standardised test results should not form the basis for decision making, but rather be used as one tool in many to build a profile of a student's strengths (Cathcart, 2005; Cross, 2007; Esquivel et al, 1999; Harris et

al., 2007; Riley et al., 2004; Riley, 2005). An emphasis on formal assessment procedures is likely to show students who are already demonstrating a high ability, rather than students who have high potential (Cathcart, 2005; Ferguson, 2006). Furthermore, the effectiveness of standardised tests to identify gifted students is questioned by Torrance (1962; in Cathcart, 2005) who found that up to 70% of creatively gifted students may not be identified through standardized measures of intelligence and ability.

### *Ongoing identification*

Both Riley (2005) and Cathcart (2005) suggest that identification procedures should be ongoing, as giftedness can be seen as developmental. Students should have many opportunities to demonstrate their ability and potential. School B described the use of their online assessments as ongoing – given to students on enrolment, at the start and end of the year, and additionally as an evaluative measure to see how well their differentiation strategies are working. School A's formalised assessment is run in alignment with the Australian calendar so the Progressive Achievement Tests, International Competitions and Assessments for Schools and National Assessment Programme – Literacy And Numeracy are only administered on set dates. If a student enters the school after these dates, they will not complete the assessment. School A's handbook does mention 'needs based' assessment tasks such as the OLSAT or Peabody Reading mastery test, which could be administered to a student to provide extra evidence for a teacher referral.

### *Cultural and linguistic bias in standardized assessment tests*

There are a number of reasons that students may not show a high ability or potential on a standardised test in an international context. For example,

identifying children with natural abilities can be difficult when the students have limited English. They may not perform as well on tests as would be expected from someone who is gifted. If test scores and IQ measures are the primary method of identifying students with gifts, then children who are new to English are at a serious disadvantage (Castellano, 2002). Many identification procedures may be ineffective for linguistically and culturally diverse students (Ford, 2003; Frasier & Passow, 1994).

Both schools' choice of standardised measures could be considered to be culturally biased, given that they are based on the Australian and North American standardised norms and curricula. For example, the tests include questions that use diagrams of Australian animals and maps. Whilst both schools expressed an aim to be 'inclusive' and 'internationally minded', the use of these tests as an identification tool does not appear to reflect these values. Interestingly, due to the use of these standardised tests, there is a large representation of Korean students in School A's 'Mathematics Olympiad' team which possibly implies that the tools used to select competition teams are not challenging for many Korean students. Ford (2003) suggests the use of culturally sensitive instruments that would be more illustrative for norms of cultural subgroups or to use less culturally loaded tools such as non-verbal abilities tests.

Teacher observation: Both schools use teacher observation and referral using a form as a procedure to identify students who may be gifted and/or talented. School A uses a 10 page form which also requires that teachers provide evidence and School B uses a one page 'Learning support' referral form. In an

International context, there are factors that may impinge on the success of observation as a strategy for identification. These are: teacher attitudes and understandings, and teachers' 'cultural competence'.

*Staff understandings and attitudes about the characteristics of gifted students*

In order to identify students teachers need to have an understanding of characteristics of gifted and talented students, and how these manifest in classroom behaviour. As discussed previously, it is important for the staff to have a strong foundation for this understanding by having a shared definition of the terms, as well as an open-minded attitude towards the notion of giftedness.

School A's staff handbook included a reference page for staff about characteristics of gifted students, as well as possible reasons for underachievement. Furthermore, the referral form used examples of behaviours to illustrate each characteristic. School B had not yet created any resource such as this for staff, and the Middle school coordinator expressed his lack of confidence that the staff have had enough professional development to be able to differentiate a 'bright student who hands their work in on time' from a gifted student.

School A staff also reported negative attitudes of others as an influence on the success of gifted education, although aside from concerns about 'labeling' students, none of the staff responses to questionnaire questions about their beliefs indicated any negative attitudes. It is possible that staff members who do hold negative attitudes towards gifted education did not respond to the survey.

*Teacher's 'cultural competence'*

The notion of teachers' cultural competence and its impact on identifying students from diverse cultures is described in the literature (Ford, 2003, Harris

et al, 2004). It is asserted that teachers with a lack of cultural competence may not be able to effectively observe and refer students from other cultures who demonstrate characteristics of giftedness. Only one staff member, the Head of Mathematics from School A, described the influence of a student's culture and language ability on his ability to identify them as being gifted. As previously noted, each school describes its commitment to inclusiveness and internationalism, but there is no detail in any of the school's documentation as to how this may be addressed in relation to special needs learners from diverse cultures.

#### *High mobility of students*

Finally, using teacher observation as a procedure for identification implies that the staff member, along with knowing the some characteristics of giftedness, and how these could manifest in other cultures also knows the student's personality and background very well. The issue of high mobility of students has an impact on the depth of the teacher's relationship with the student, and may also affect the behaviour of the student, making it less likely that they will be identified.

Environmental influences, namely the opinion of peers, have an impact on the gifted students and particularly adolescents. Buescher (1989) describes the irony in the decline of risk taking behaviours, which, at a younger age characterised some gifted behaviours. This is explained by the increasing awareness that outstanding behaviours set them apart from the group.

Students may tend to mask or hide their giftedness in order to fit in, preferring conformity and the acceptance of a desired social group (Foust & Booker, 2007). Similarly, Riley (2001) has found that females may see their

giftedness as making them unpopular with their peers, leading them to underachieve so that they may avoid the social penalties, and gain more time for social activities.

'Masking' behaviours taken on by students, particularly adolescents, who move schools often was raised as an issue both by the GATC, Head of Middle school, and in the handbook of School A, where it was described as a 'forced choice dilemma'. The Principal of School B also raised 'transience' of students as an issue in the International context that impacts upon the effectiveness of identification and provision.

#### Parent nomination/referral

Parent nominations at the time of enrolment, or parent referrals throughout the school year were considered appropriate identification procedures for both schools. The US Department of State (2010) recommends that when enrolling in an International school, it is important that families become knowledgeable and are prepared to advocate for their children.

The GATC and some of the staff of School A and the Principal of School B discussed their beliefs about parent referral as an appropriate form of identification. The parent nomination form for School A was very comprehensive and included a range of characteristics with examples for different ages groups. Whilst value was placed on parent nomination, there was also the reservation that parents do not have an accurate picture of their child's ability in relation to their peers. This seems like a logical assumption given that teachers work with many children and should be able to accurately place their abilities. Staff members of School A expressed a concern that parents have high expectations of their children and may 'push' for them to be identified as gifted, when they may not

be. Research, however, has found that parents are generally more accurate in their assessment of the child's ability than teachers (Cathcart, 2005; Silverman, 2003).

It is unclear as to whether parents know that nomination is an option for them; and how they are able to access the forms and appropriate staff member or indeed, that identification procedures are taking place in either school. Neither school makes reference to this procedure on their website or in their parent handbook. Likewise, neither school has contact details for the GATC or Learning support departments on their websites.

### **Provisions**

#### Range of provisions

School A used the provisions of: withdrawal groups to work on competitions, one mentorship, one example of accelerating an entire subject, and in-class differentiation for gifted and talented students. School B focused primarily on differentiating learning experiences in the classroom, including some acceleration of mathematical topics. Literature suggests that schools should draw on a range of strategies to meet the diverse needs of individuals (Cathcart, 2005; Chance, 1998; Miller, 2000; Pfeiffer, 2003; Reis, 2007; Riley, 2007). An aim to provide flexible approaches in order to meet individual needs was represented in both school's documentation and staff interview discussions.

#### Differentiation:

Qualitative differentiation describes the modification of learning pathways, content or product to suit the needs of individuals (Riley et al., 2004).



Differentiation may include enrichment, or acceleration of the curriculum. Both schools focused on in-class differentiation as their primary provision for gifted and talented students. This was justified by the schools' values of inclusivity. While there was no whole-school approach to strategies to differentiate for gifted students in either school, both schools had support staff (the GATC and the HLS) who were available to help teachers plan, or to team teach lessons. Additionally, the GATCs of School A published the 'Out of the Box' newsletter for parents, and had run optional sessions on differentiating for gifted and talented students at a staff professional development day.

Classroom teachers at both schools were primarily responsible for planning and implementing differentiation, which raises the issues of expertise and time.

#### *Teacher expertise*

In order for teachers to meet the needs of gifted students in a regular classroom, they need to have an understanding of the principles of differentiation, as well as a range of strategies and resources to draw upon (Riley, 2005). Staff at School A reported having participated in a range of professional development opportunities in the field of gifted education. Several staff reported that they had undertaken postgraduate study and all staff believed that they had experience teaching gifted students. The staff handbook also included several strategies and ideas for teachers to consider when planning for differentiation. Staff responses to the questionnaire and interviews demonstrated that they considered differentiation to be an important provision and felt that they were making improvements as staff. They also reported that

differentiation occurs less as the students get older, with more emphasis placed on the two-level subject model.

Likewise, the HLS and Principal of School B reported that differentiation was the most appropriate provision. Staff members of School B reported less professional development experience, and the Principal raised his point that while teachers are able to discuss differentiation practices, once the classroom door is shut, many 'teach to the middle' and do not have the expertise to differentiate experiences in a meaningful way.

#### *Time and workload*

As Cathcart (2005) notes, once teachers consider the amount of work and consideration required to effectively differentiate learning experiences for gifted students, 'alarm bells start ringing'. Many staff members of both schools raised the issue of time and workload pressures. Staff saw the needs of exceptionally gifted students to be very high. This was exemplified by School B's Middle School coordinator in his description of the differentiated project he had planned for his gifted Mathematics student.

The GATC of School A and HLS of School B also mentioned that time and workload for themselves was an issue. Their main goal was to work in classrooms to support teachers, and they both reported a difficulty in finding time to establish relationships and support systems with all teachers and classes, especially in the Middle schools, which have a subject teacher, secondary model. Both of these staff members discussed the benefits of using withdrawal of like-ability groups to work on competitions or projects - an option that would be an efficient use of time. School A was using withdrawal for work on competitions,

but the HLS of School B felt that there were not yet enough students to warrant this approach.

### Other provisions

Both schools expressed an interest in expanding their range of provisions. School A reported using competitions as a strategy to engage gifted students in Mathematics. The Head of Mathematics and GATC felt that this was a successful approach. Bicknell (2008) supports the use of competitions as a provision for gifted students noting that they can improve motivation and enhance self-directed learning skills. Competitions in other subjects are less frequent, as are opportunities for inter-school sports, Sciences or Arts competitions, given that School A runs on a Southern hemisphere calendar, and other International schools in the country use the Northern calendar.

Mentorships were planned to be used as a provision in both schools. The GATC of School A had arranged one partnership, although he expressed that it was difficult to find an appropriate mentor. Both schools expressed an interest in looking for links and relationships with wider community members rather than solely the school community. At the time of study, neither school had undertaken any links with community businesses, local schools or organisations.

### *High mobility of staff and students*

The high mobility of students was identified as an issue by the Principal of School B who suggested that as students start and leave so rapidly in International schools, that staff may not be motivated to put a set of procedures and provisions in place. He also suggested that students may leave before the

programme has been properly put in place, leaving staff with an ‘unfinished’ programme that has not been evaluated for use with future students.

Equally, the transience of staff has an effect of what range of provisions are put in place, as evidenced by the GATCs of School A, who had only been in their roles for 6 months at the time of the study and described their unfamiliarity with the city and a need to explore what options and resources the community could offer.

### **Summary**

In an international school it is key that staff have a shared understanding of ‘giftedness and talent’. This understanding should reflect current theory and research. The school should also write their definitions with consideration for the cultures represented in their school and the needs of the school community. Further to this, research suggests that schools that have students from a range of cultures should promote ‘cultural competence’ in their staff. A understanding of the ways in which giftedness is expressed and valued in a range of cultures means it is more likely that staff will be equipped to identify these students.

These shared understandings and school-wide definition can be created through professional development experiences and readings and through using the resources of the GATC or Learning support staff. Involvement of the parents and community may also promote broader and culturally appropriate ideas about giftedness. It is also the responsibility of the school leadership to promote a staff culture of reflective practice, inclusivity and ongoing professional development. While School A has created a definition for a ‘highly able’ student and a policy document, neither document acknowledged the cultural diversity of learners in their school. The policy document is on its third cycle of

implementation. School B has not yet devised a school-wide definition or policy document.

The attitude and expertise required to enable teachers to effectively identify and differentiate for the needs of gifted students was raised as a theme across both schools. In both schools, teachers reported an awareness that gifted students have individual needs that should be catered for, and a willingness to do so. School A had targeted gifted education and differentiation as an area for development. They responded to this aim by creating a team of Gifted and Talented coordinators, who in turn created a comprehensive handbook of information about gifted students for staff. Furthermore, the staff members who responded to the survey report experience of professional development sessions, readings, conferences and under/post graduate study in the field.

While the staff of School B receive support and some resources from the Learning Support department, they report little other professional development experiences in the field. The difference between the range of staff understanding of giftedness between each school was marked, with School A showing a range of awareness that is more in alignment with what we know today about giftedness and talent. Furthermore, the staff of School A showed a greater confidence in their ability to plan and carry out differentiated learning experiences for gifted students.

In the cases of both schools there appears to be a tension between retaining an 'Australian' or 'American' ethos and promoting inclusivity, cultural awareness and internationalism. The International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) require that schools commit to the mission of promoting 'International mindedness' and that all schools carrying the IB programmes express this in

their school philosophy (IBO, 2007). Indeed, 'internationalism' and 'inclusivity of cultures and learning styles' were terms that were used in both schools' ethos and values and philosophy statements.

Neither school however presented any policy or handbook that detailed what was being done to acknowledge and accommodate the individual needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Likewise, this was a theme that arose with only one staff member throughout the interview and questionnaire responses.

This 'leaning' towards Australian and American ethos, assessments and resources was also evident in the schools' choice of standardised test, which they both used as evidence when identifying gifted students. The cultural bias of the nationally normed tests may impede students from other cultures from performing as well on the tests. Equally, it may enable them to perform better, given that some students may have curriculum experience of a higher level of content.

It is suggested that emphasising the value of standardised test results is not the best measure for a school. Instead staff members should be guided to monitor and collect data about exceptional individual achievement, dispositions and behaviour, within their ongoing monitoring and formative assessment, then look at analysis of school summative achievement data to complete the picture.

Finally, the transient nature of an international school community has implications for both students and staff. Staff believe that students who move schools a lot, particularly adolescents, may try to mask their abilities in order to fit in. Gaps in their content knowledge may also make it difficult for gifted students to show their abilities. Furthermore, students may leave the school

before the teacher has had a chance to get to know their personality and abilities or establish and evaluate a programme of provision.

The staff at School A tends to stay at the school for a good length of time- on average 5.8 years. However, it should be ensured that new staff are inducted to the policy and gifted and talented teams' resources, and are given opportunities to engage in professional development. New staff members are often unaware of the resources available when starting in a new school or country, so opportunities with in the community for provisions and persons who may be able to help with gifted students should also be explored.

### **Recommendations**

After reviewing the findings from this study, and drawing links with current literature that is associated with giftedness, identification, and cultural diversity of gifted and talented learners, I have made the following recommendations that international schools may find to be of use.

#### **Definition and Policy**

The high mobility of teachers and families, as well as the culturally diverse student and teacher body implies that a school as a whole community must adopt a philosophy for the nature of giftedness and talent with a definition of giftedness that stresses that it is a developmental process. The ways in which these learners' needs should be provided for, and the methods for identification should also be developed with input from the community (Esquivel & Houtz, 1999). A structure for gifted and talented provisions should be recorded as a formal policy. This will help to 'institutionalise' support for exceptional children

and provide a continuity of services despite high staff turnover, and differing staff experience (Kusuma-Powell and Powell, 2004; deWet, 2005).

### Staff professional development

In order to make the best decisions for gifted education, and ensure that these are informed by current research and evidence, the school should promote a culture and requirement of ongoing professional development. Focus should be on definitions and characteristics of gifted students, appropriate strategies for differentiation, and exploration of identification and other strategies for provision. It is also recommended that the staff learn more about the cultures represented in their school, including information about curriculum content and how learning takes place in classrooms of the students' home countries (Ford & Milner, 2004). Also an understanding of traits that are valued, and definitions of giftedness in other cultures can help increase the 'cultural competence' of staff and their effectiveness in identifying and providing for the needs of gifted students (Cohen, 1990; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Harris et al, 2007).

### Make links with the school community

'Engage parents and carers more constructively by helping them to understand better the provision made for their gifted and talented children and how best they might support them' (The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, 2009).

To further optimise learning for gifted and talented students, there needs to be a home/school partnership (Harris et al., 2007). Parents need to be aware of the opportunities the school can offer their gifted child which means



information should be made available through translated documents or having a translator available at an information session if necessary. School handbooks, websites and newsletters should publicise what the school s doing with their gifted and talented learners, and included contact details for relevant staff members.

#### Network with local or regional international schools

As discussed in the literature review, provisions for gifted students such as competitions are less available than in domestic schools. Furthermore, opportunities within the community such as links with business, and access to mentors were more limited due to differing languages or attitudes. In order to promote opportunities for provision such as inter-school competitions or collaborative projects, and to raise awareness of opportunities within the communities, it is recommended that schools investigate creating a 'gifted and talented network'. Teachers from either local or international schools in the region could also pool resources and ideas. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (2009), found that gifted students benefited from productive local or regional collaborations, enabling them to gain access to events and resources in the local region and nationally.

#### Identification

International schools need to look further than standardised test scores to identify those with natural abilities. A flexible approach is required, possibly using 'culturally-fair' standardised tests that examine the many aspects of reasoning and expressions of gifts in the domains (Cross, 2007; NSW Department of Education, 2005).

Gagné (1995) suggests that measures of aptitudes and talents can take many forms. A wide range of tests, including non-verbal, could be used to identify intellectual gifts. Other strategies such as auditions, portfolios, and sporting performance may draw attention to the creative, socio affective and sensorimotor domains (Feldhuson, 2001). On going teacher observation in a variety of contexts, and the use of formative assessment data should also be valuable processes in the school's identification procedure.

Bernal (2002) suggests that schools employ gifted and talented teachers from a range of cultures themselves, as well providing teachers of additional languages with professional development in gifted education.

### **Limitations**

This study was designed to collect and present information about gifted education in international schools. Although many schools were invited to participate, only two schools were involved in the research. This means that it is not possible to make generalisations about gifted education in international schools. Equally, recommendations made by the study should be viewed critically.

Both schools were linked to a 'home country'. This meant that the ethos and educational practices of that country were very much evident in the school's principles and practices. Many international schools are affiliated with 'home countries', but many are not, and it would have been preferable to have a range of contexts.

Given the very small response to the invitation to participate, both schools were in an English speaking country. The study initially aimed to look at

the issues that may be raised by being an English speaking school in a non English speaking country, and how this affected access to provision for gifted students, as well as the influence of the attitudes of the wider community towards the school. This study therefore, may not be representative of schools' issues in non English speaking countries.

I did interview the Principals of both schools, but the number of adults interviewed was only six. Only 32 staff from School A and 16 staff from School B responded to the questionnaire. It is possible that their views and practices may not be representative of the whole staff and wider community. It is also possible that these staff were attracted to taking part in the questionnaire because they had a positive attitude towards gifted education, or experience in gifted education.

Given the constraints of geographical location and time, actual classroom practice was not observed. Furthermore, I did not interview any students or parents. Therefore, links made between principles held by the school and actual classroom practice were made 'secondhand' through the interview and questionnaires responses.

The schools were very different. One school had been in operation for nearly 20 years and was in its third cycle of its policy implementation. The other school was only 18 months old and had not had time to establish a policy or clear vision for practices with gifted students. Again, these differences could affect the generalisability of the common themes between the two schools.

### **Areas for future study**

The findings of this study raised rather more questions than were able to be answered. It is my belief that the study should be repeated using a wider range of schools from a wider range of International contexts to collect more information about how schools identify and provide for gifted and talented students.

It is suggested that the following areas also be considered for future study:

- Definitions: How do a wider range of International schools define giftedness and talent? Particularly, how do schools with no links to any particular country define these terms?
- Professional development: How do International schools provide staff with professional development opportunities for gifted and talented education. Do International schools consider this to be a priority for professional development?
- Prevalence: Is there a greater prevalence of gifted and talented learners in international school classrooms? What are the influences on prevalence in any given context?
- Performance expectations for students at each age level from a range of countries. What are some age benchmarks in a range of national curricula? How are exceptional performance and or potential defined in a range of cultures?

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