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*Special Abilities:
A Māori Perspective*

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Abstract

This study investigated special abilities from a Māori perspective. In particular it sought to discover if traditional and contemporary concepts of special abilities existed and if so, what these concepts were. It also sought Māori opinion on effective and appropriate ways of identifying and catering for Māori CWSA.

A two-pronged approach was utilised. Possible traditional and contemporary Māori concepts were constructed from:

- a documentary analysis of a variety of resources
- informal, exploratory interviews with 33 Māori participants.

Whānau networks were used to select the interview sample of 6 kaumātua, 12 educators and 15 "others" who strongly identified themselves as being Māori and had a demonstrated commitment to Māoritanga. Participants came from a variety of educational and socio-economic backgrounds and there was wide tribal and hapū representation.

Data from documentary analysis and interviews was both equivalent and complementary. The concepts of special abilities from the past and present that emerged:

- were holistic in nature and inextricably intertwined with other Māori concepts, values, customs and beliefs.
- were broad and wide-ranging. Many abilities and qualities were valued. These included spiritual, cognitive, affective, aesthetic, artistic, musical, psychomotor, social, intuitive, creative, leadership and cultural abilities and qualities.
- were not bounded by social class, economic status or gender.
- were grounded firmly in Māori kaupapa.
- placed importance on both "qualities" and "abilities." Qualities in the intrapersonal, affective domain were particularly valued.

- incorporated an expectation that abilities and qualities would be used in the service of others.
- involved the bestowing of mana tāngata especially in the areas of service to others and cultural knowledge.

The suggestions about how Māori CWSA could be identified and catered for at home and at school contained many approaches equally applicable to all children. Culture-specific suggestions emphasised the encouragement and teaching of Māoritanga, the development of strong, supportive whānau networks, the training of teachers in Māoritanga especially aspects relevant to recognising and catering for Māori CWSA and the provision of culturally appropriate education. The latter involved teaching programmes, strategies, styles and environments particularly suited to Māori children. It was also emphasised that educational provisions for Māori CWSA should not isolate them from their culture.

The research concluded that to enable children who identify as Māori and live within Māori norms to realise their potential, identification procedures and educational provisions should be based firmly on a Māori concept of special abilities.

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