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Principals Discuss Gifted Education: An Analysis of Discourse

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

Master of Education

at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand.

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2000

Acknowledgements

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the help and support of my supervisors, Tracy Riley and Andy Lock.

I would like to thank the participants for sharing their time and thoughts. Massey University Ethics committee approval was granted before research began.

I would especially like to thank Nana Jill, Poppa George, Grandma, Grandad, Aunty Allie, Aunty Kylie and of course Daddy for taking loving care of Caitie while Mummy did her study.

Abstract

When discussing the allocation of resources to gifted students in their schools, principals draw upon a number of discursive resources to explain, justify, maintain and dismiss arguments relating to equity and student needs. This discourse analysis of interviews with New Zealand principals shows how language is used to build a construct of 'giftedness', which is limiting in its view of the characteristics of gifted children and their educational needs. Principals describe their school's gifted educational programmes as being based upon the 'restrictions' of organisational structures which leads to the prioritisation of students 'needs.' Often the needs of special needs students are prioritised over those of gifted students in the name of 'equity'. Educators' discourse, which tends to focus on technical issues rather than theory, helps to cloak the moral and ideological nature of such practice by presenting it as the result of pragmatic issues beyond the influence of school principals. Analysis of educators' discourse is an important basis from which to challenge practice, which limits the educational opportunities of gifted students.

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