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A Students' Perspective of the Effect of Withdrawal Programming in New Zealand Primary Schools:

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the degree of Masters in Education at Massey University.

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Abstract

Gifted and talented students have a voice and their own perceptions of their involvement in programmes aimed at catering for their unique abilities. This study examines withdrawal programmes within New Zealand primary schools from the participating students' perspectives.

This research makes a valuable contribution to this limited research in this field and provides useful information and recommendations for teachers of primary schools when planning to implement withdrawal programmes aimed at catering for the needs of our gifted and talented children.

The study concluded that:

- In the schools studied for the purposes of this research the teachers had a crucial role to play in identifying these gifted and talented children. While all three schools identified with a broad notion of giftedness and talent their identification procedures were not consistent with this broad notion, incorporating teacher nomination as a primary means.
- Each withdrawal programme was very unique to each particular school and the majority of all children interviewed spoke in very positive terms about their involvement in the withdrawal programmes. The majority of the children found the withdrawal programme fun and commented on the provision of choice and opportunities that weren't offered back in the regular classroom.
- It can not be concluded from this research that withdrawal programmes are a viable and valuable tool in relation to meeting the educational needs of these children. The question remains that while one can plan for enrichment in a withdrawal programme, one must question whether the programme is actually challenging and extending the abilities of these children.

Unless we provide rigorous programmes for our gifted and talented students the talents and abilities of these children will be wasted. These children are our future and we need to be providing programmes that challenge and extend their current abilities so that these children can realise and achieve to their full potential in our society. These children have special gifts and talents and deserve the right to an education that meets their needs and challenges their abilities to allow them to achieve to this full potential, and be successful members of our society in the future.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction:	
1.1 Rationale	1
1.1 Research Objectives	2
1.2 Defining the terms: The notion of giftedness	2
1.3 Conclusion	5
1.4 Overview	6
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature:	
2.1 Characteristics exhibited by our Gifted and Talented Students	7
2.2 Identification of our Gifted and Talented Students	12
2.3 Educating the Gifted and Talented: Acceleration and Enrichment	17
2.4 Withdrawal Programmes	27
2.5 Research on Student Perceptions	34
2.6 Summary of the Literature Review	37
Chapter 3: Methodology	
3.1 Introduction	40
3.2 Research Method	40
3.3 Data Gathering Instruments	42
3.4 Sample Population	46
3.5 Procedure and Ethical Considerations	46
3.6 Analysis of data	49
3.7 Validity and Reliability	51
3.8 Limitations to Methodology	53
3.9 Conclusion	54

Chapter 4: Results	
4.1 Introduction: Three Case Studies	55
4.2 Case Study One: School A	55
4.3 The first individual interview	56
4.4 Student Perceptions: The first focus group interview	63
4.5 Concluding Remarks	68
4.6 Case Study Two: School B	69
4.7 The second individual interview	70
4.8 Student Perceptions: The second focus group interview	76
4.9 Concluding Remarks	81
4.10 Case Study Three: School C	82
4.11 The third individual interview	82
4.12 Student Perceptions: The second focus group interview	90
4.13 Concluding Remarks	95
4.14 Discussions and Conclusions	96

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions	
5.1 Introduction	101
5.2 Identification	102
5.3 Positive perceptions of participation	105
5.4 Perceptions of having education needs met	107
5.5 Social and Emotional needs	109
5.6 Teacher objectives verses student perceptions	111
5.7 Implications of the research	114
5.8 Limitations of the research	116
5.9 Recommendations for future research	117
5.10 Conclusion	119

References122

Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of invitation for school participation128

Appendix B: Information sheet for schools129

Appendix C: School consent form131

Appendix D: Letter of invitation for child participation132

Appendix E: Information sheet for child and family133

Appendix F: Child and Parent consent form135

Appendix G: Individual teacher interview questions136

Appendix H: Focus group interview questions137

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Much of past and present research about current educational programmes for gifted and talented students, particularly that of withdrawal programmes, has focused on the effects and benefits of such a programme. Too often we as adults assume we know educationally, what is best for our children, but research rarely suggests we have actually discussed the students' perspectives and what they believe. If these programmes are aimed at meeting the educational needs of gifted children, then surely it would be beneficial for the success of future programmes to discuss and analyse the programme from the student's point of view. This study aims to understand the participant students' perspectives of current withdrawal programmes in New Zealand primary schools, to aid in a deepened understanding for future direction in catering for the needs of our gifted and talented students.

In New Zealand there is a growing awareness of the need to provide our gifted and talented students with educational opportunities aimed at developing their abilities and talents. Enrichment and acceleration are two commonly used terms in discussing educational programmes for our gifted and talented students. Much research suggests the need to blend the two in providing the necessary balance for effectively catering for the educational needs of these children. Within New Zealand, the Ministry of Education (2000) suspected that enrichment was the preferred provisional strategy for meeting the needs of gifted and talented students, however, in Riley, Bevan-Brown, Bicknell, Carroll-Lind, and Kearney (2004) educators reported a preference for the integration of enrichment and acceleration which the literature supports. Of schools that didn't have a preference for a combination of the two, enrichment was viewed more favourably, with planned enrichment being more likely than planned acceleration. One such programme that traditionally incorporates and follows the principles behind enrichment is that of the withdrawal or pull out programme. Research suggests that withdrawal programmes are flexible with the possibility of incorporating the provision of acceleration with the previous enrichment, as is ideally suggested (Townsend, 2004). It is this flexibility, and this need to promote a merging of the

two for effectively meeting the needs of our gifted and talented students, that provides reason to examine the current structure of withdrawal programmes in New Zealand. More specifically, and an often neglected area within this provision for gifted and talented children, is the need to relate the school's interpretation of the programme, to the perspective of the participants involved (Braggett, 1994).

1.2 Research Objectives:

The purpose of this study was to examine withdrawal programmes in New Zealand primary schools taking the form of a study in two parts. Firstly, seeking to gather information about the structure of current withdrawal programmes in New Zealand primary schools and secondly exploring the participating students' experiences and perceptions of their involvement in such a programme.

PART ONE: The objective for the first part of the study was to examine the identification of these gifted and talented students and develop an understanding of the withdrawal programme that they are currently involved in. One to one interviews and document analysis were used to gather such data. The teachers of the withdrawal programme were given the opportunity to voice their perceptions about the programmes, such as its structure, procedures, curriculum content etc.

PART TWO: The objective for the second part of the study was to understand the students' perceptions of their involvement in the withdrawal programme offered at their school. Focus group interviews were used to gather such perceptions.

1.3 The nature of gifted and talented:

The defining of what it is to be gifted has had little consensus within the field of gifted and talented education. Early definitions of giftedness focused solely on those children exhibiting high general intelligence, with IQ testing being a form of identifying and assessing these children. The concept of intelligence is more modernly recognised as a

more complex notion than was first thought. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences is one such theory that looks at this intricate notion of intelligence, as a way to characterise gifted individuals (Sternberg, 2000). Gardner describes eight dimensions of intelligence, being linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, musical, spatial, bodily kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist intelligence (McAlpine, Moltzen & Riley, 2000). Renzulli (1977) proposed a widely accepted view of giftedness. He views gifted and talented behaviours as a combination of above average intellectual ability, high task motivation and high level of creativity. A contemporary view of giftedness incorporates a broader definition of what it is to be gifted, having moved away from the notion of high intelligence being equivalent to giftedness. Such a definition now encompasses a more multidimensional set of characteristics, with the inclusion of areas such as creativity, leadership, artistic ability, intelligence, cultural abilities and qualities or it may be ones' giftedness in a specific academic field, such as mathematics or reading. Such definitions have generated categories with which to identify children who maybe gifted and talented. There are a number of definitions and models that try to define the concept of giftedness, but there is no specific one that is agreed upon by all people, due to the fact that the term giftedness has different meanings for different people. Bailey, Knight, and Riley (2001) note "that while there is no universally agreed upon definition, most recognise that, with children, we are talking about high achievement, or high potential, in comparison with others of the same age" (p. 1).

Another such difficulty with understanding what it is to be gifted is understanding the terminology particularly the terms gifted and talented. Much research incorporates both words as meaning the same, in that to be talented is to be gifted. However, Gagne' (1991) proposed the differentiated giftedness-talent model, which dismissed the idea that these two ideas were interchangeable. Unlike much literature that interchanges the terms gifted and talented, Gagne' (1985, 1992) has argued for a distinction between the two concepts. "According to Gagne' giftedness relates to natural abilities, aptitudes or intelligence's, while talent relates more to outstanding achievements in the field of human endeavours" (McAlpine, 1996, p. 35). According to Gagne's model, giftedness occurs within the domains of intellect, creativity, socioaffective and sensorimotor. Central to this model are

the environment, intrapersonal, and motivational catalysts, which nurture or impair an individual's attainment. It is these catalysts that Gagne' suggests allow for the changeover from giftedness to talent. Such fields of talent include physical sciences, health, social sciences, communication, arts, administration, athletics and many other areas. Gagne' looked at giftedness as applying to the characteristics of a specific individual, such as one's intellect, and the process of acquiring a talent. On the other hand he looked at talents, as being specific to a field of study such as music, hence the final product that has been accomplished. Sternberg (2000) states with reference to Gagne', "He has suggested that gifted individuals are those who come into the world with the potential for extraordinary contributions, whereas talented individuals are those who develop their potential for contributions" (p. 231). Gagne' also proposes two groups of catalysts. The first group is intrapersonal, such as one's motivation or self-confidence, and the second group being environmental, being significant persons or environments. The idea of chance is also built into the model in the environmental factors. Such chance may include simply being in the right place at the right time. From looking at the model, it can therefore be implied that such factors as one's home environment or level of motivation, can either hinder or enhance the potential of that individual. Gagne's model recognises and takes these factors into consideration when looking at children who are either gifted or talented (McAlpine, 2004).

"Further complicating the picture is the fact that the concepts of giftedness and talent differ from culture to culture. This is because a culture's perception of special abilities is shaped by its beliefs, customs, needs, values, concepts and attitudes" (Bevan-Brown, 2004, p. 91). The work of Bevan-Brown (2004) highlights the difficulty of applying a single, defining concept of gifted and talented students within our New Zealand education system. Accordingly we must be aware of the different conceptualisations from both within and between cultures, toward our gifted and talented students.

With the development of a multi-categorical concept of intelligence and the broader definition of gifted and talented, identification procedures also need to be developed. All identification methods have their own strengths and weaknesses, therefore it is important to

refrain from reliance on one single method (McAlpine, 2004). The aim of identification procedures should be to identify our gifted and talented students for a purpose, and needs to conform to the definition of the school or culture concerned. Such a purpose should be to identify the needs of our gifted and talented students in order to develop appropriate educational programmes aimed at benefiting the individual students it serves (Riley, 2000).

New Zealand is a multicultural society and it is important to understand the variation of conceptual understanding between cultures toward the concept of giftedness and talent. It is important for each school to negotiate their perception of the concept of giftedness and talented, with their student body, parents and the wider community, relevant to the underlying culture of the school, hence respecting and valuing those it serves (McAlpine & Reid, 1987). Upon achieving that goal, schools must then seek to develop and implement appropriate differentiated programmes across a continuum of provisions.

1.4 Conclusion:

This research specifically examines the perceptions of withdrawal programmes in New Zealand primary schools and understand the participant student's point of view. "There is a growing awareness of the special needs of gifted and talented students and of the importance of providing them with an educational environment that offers maximum opportunities to develop their special abilities" (McAlpine, Moltzen & Riley, 2000, p. 6). It is this appreciation, and the establishment of withdrawal programmes in New Zealand primary schools, that provides purpose for this research. If withdrawal programmes are put in place as a means to acknowledge the need to create an educational environment that aims to develop the abilities of these children, then examining current programmes in place and hearing the voices of the participating students can only heighten this understanding. This research adds new perspectives to current research, namely the students' voice. In order for educators to effectively provide educational practices specific to meeting the needs of gifted and talented students, we must conduct research in order to understand the participating students' experiences and perceptions of current existing withdrawal

programmes.

1.5 Overview:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter introduces the thesis by explaining the rationale that underpins this study. It briefly explains the notion of gifted and talented and outlines the objectives of this research study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature both from an international and New Zealand perspective. It summarises relevant research for the use of withdrawal programmes in meeting the needs of gifted and talented students.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter reviews the research methodology used for this research. A justification discussion is presented about the specific data collection methods used and relevant methodology employed. Ethical considerations for this study are also examined here.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter presents the findings from each of the three participating schools, in the form of a case study on each school's programme and the results obtained from the data gathering procedures employed. Each school is presented from the teacher's perspective then the children's perspective.

Chapter Five: Discussions and Conclusions

This chapter reviews the conclusions made from the data collected and analyses these results in relation to current literature in the area of study. It also discusses the implications and limitations of this study, and makes recommendations for future research.