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IDENTIFYING GIFTEDNESS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES

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Barbara Ann Allan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated current understanding of giftedness as it relates to NZ early childhood centre settings, in order to produce a teacher-friendly identification tool and to explore the effect of identification on curriculum provision for young children displaying gifted behaviours.

Analysis of international research literature provided an initial source of indicators that could be used by teachers within the specific context of NZ early childhood centres in order to identify gifted behaviours in young children. Academics involved in gifted education and early childhood teachers experienced with gifted young children critiqued an identification instrument based on these indicators. Modifications based on these critiques resulted in an instrument of indicators of gifted behaviours considered relevant to NZ early childhood settings grouped under headings of cognition and language, approach to learning, creativity and social competence. Seventeen early childhood centres, involving a total of 167 children selected on the basis of age, gender, and ethnicity only, trialled the instrument. Seven centres participated in a training workshop previous to trialling the instrument, 10 centres received no pre-trial training.

Focus group interviews revealed that using the instrument increased teachers' understanding and recognition of gifted behaviour, but that participation in a short training session did not increase success in identifying giftedness. Teachers did not show clear understanding of giftedness relating to diverse cultures or negative behaviour. A further phase of the research used unstructured interviews in six individual centres over one month to investigate the impact of identification on provision for gifted children. Teachers expressed a need for support services to assist in catering for gifted young children. The research demonstrated that while the identification instrument was useful to teachers, there are needs for further professional support and extended pre-service and in-service training regarding both the diversity of giftedness and the provision of differentiated programmes for gifted young children.

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