
Gifted and Talented Maori and Pasifika Students: Issues in Their Identification and Program and Pastoral Care Provision

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Recently I had the immense privilege of interviewing a gifted and talented Māori boy in the senior secondary school. He shared his journey from personal and family trauma, including rejection by his peers when he was misplaced in a middle band class in his early secondary schooling through to becoming a successful academic who has won acceptance amongst his peers and has a clear sense of purpose and direction in his life. What are the secrets to his success and the success of other gifted and talented Māori and Pasifika students and what can we learn about identification, programme provision and pastoral care from their stories?

A twenty-minute presentation only gives scope for a brief comment about some of the issues. These are not necessarily the most important issues, but they are some of the issues of which I have become aware through my research and almost 16 years experience as principal of two primary schools, one with a 42% Māori and 21% Pacific Island roll and the other with a 57% Māori roll.

In common with all students, I believe Māori and Pasifika students are involved in a search for their personal identity. They want to know who they are, what they are here for and where they are going in life.

In addition to the search for identity there are some culturally specific issues that are significant. Conceptions of giftedness and/or intelligence detailed in published works generally have their derivation in western European culture. As a result there are significant issues that arise for individuals in indigenous and minority cultures related to identification, program provision and pastoral care. Mono-culturally biased conceptions of giftedness have led to mono-culturally biased identification procedures, program provision and pastoral care. This relates to the pattern of dominance and subordination in intercultural relations that developed in New Zealand (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

A third issue is the different social and cultural nature of Māori and Pasifika homes by comparison with pakeha (New Zealand Europeans). A Māori senior staff member in one school, whose wife is a Pacific Islander, commented, "I know through extensive researching about PI (Pasifika) and Māori there is a massive difference culturally in terms of socially at home compared to pakeha. These boys have very small homes. They don't have an area to study. They sleep in the lounge, especially PI. They don't

have access to the Internet. Socially those are very difficult. They spend a huge proportion of their time at church and doing service.” These wider issues all relate to more specific issues related to identification, program provision and pastoral care.

In New Zealand, both Māori and Pasifika students have been under-represented in programs for the gifted (Keen, 2003; Riley, Bevan-Brown, Bicknell, Carroll-Lind & Kearney, 2004). We need to reflect on why Māori and Pasifika students are under-represented and question the means by which it is determined students should be participants in programs for the gifted and talented.

Frasier, Garcia and Passow (1995) concluded from their review of assessment issues that there are three main reasons for the under-representation of minority groups in programs for the gifted and talented:

1. Test bias. Cultural and language issues make standardised testing unfair for students from ethnic minorities.
2. Selective referrals. The attitudes of teachers and their inadequate knowledge about minority students means that many gifted and talented students are never identified.
3. Reliance on deficit-based paradigms. Because educators focus on the deficits of students they fail to recognise the strengths that they have.

What then can be done to address these issues?

Reviewing tests for mono-cultural bias and providing tuition on test-taking techniques and providing sample practice questions can enable traditional-style tests to be a more accurate reflection of cognitive ability. Culturally neutral tests such as Torrance’s Tests of Creativity and Ravens Progressive Matrices inevitably reveal gifted and talented Māori and/or Pasifika students who have not been identified by other tests. Silverman (2002) considers that many gifted and talented students who are never identified are visual-spatial learners. I have used her visual-spatial identifier across a sample of around 1600 Year 9 and 10 students at Hamilton Boys’ High School from 2007 to 2009. I have then checked the extreme visual-spatial students from middle and bottom band classes and checked their non-verbal reasoning subtest scores on the standardised MidYIS test undertaken by all our Year 9 students. Those with high scores of 114+ have been tested using Ravens’ Progressive Matrices. I have had several Māori boys who have performed extremely well including two who have gone off the top of the scale in the Ravens’ test with percentiles of 99+. Further follow up has then been taken, including consultation with parents and teachers.

A first step to dealing with the issue of selective referrals should be developing greater teacher awareness of Māori and Pasifika as well as traditional western European conceptions of giftedness and talent. This would enable teachers to identify giftedness through observation in the normal course of their teaching. Significantly, from Bevan-Brown’s (2004) research with Māori the areas most frequently identified by interviewees as domains of giftedness were:

- Outstanding personal qualities and high moral values.
- Service to others.
- Traditional knowledge and skills. (p. 178)

It is highly improbable that any sample of western European adults would have come up with such a list. Miller's (2003) research with people of Cook Islands' ethnicity indicated a high value also placed on these domains of giftedness. Clearly, to develop appropriate identification processes for Māori and Pasifika students and to also make appropriate program provision, educators must take cognisance of what is valued by Māori and Pasifika people, and involve Māori and Pasifika educators and the whanau of students.

Now we move to consider deficit thinking. Think of chess. How would you describe the stereotypical skilled chess player? Would you picture a Māori girl in that role? When I was principal at Kihikihi Primary School I ran a lunchtime chess club. We had a ladder and students competed for places on the ladder. I decided to enter the top seven in the Waikato Individual Chess Championships. Five of those top seven were Māori girls, one was a Māori boy and the other was my son. Three of the Māori girls beat boys from a well-coached private preparatory school. Kihikihi School did not have a stereotypical group of chess players. They were the only Māori at the tournament. Negative stereotyping is strongly linked to deficit thinking. Encouraging students to break the stereotypes is an important part of breaking down deficit thinking. Challenging teachers to discard their stereotypes is also vitally important.

With regard to providing effective programs for Māori and Pasifika students the key issues relate to relevance, challenge and teaching strategies.

Relevant programs will provide opportunities for students to make links with their cultural roots. For example, in the primary school there are reading texts produced by Learning Media of particular relevance to Māori and Pasifika students such as "Uncle Timi's sleep" which is set in the Cook Islands and "At the marae". At the secondary school level, in the English program, Māori woman author, Patricia Grace's "Journey" is a Year 11 set text at Hamilton Boy's High School. It explores the issue of dislocation from the land and change in the world of the Māori.

Programs need to have sufficient challenge. Several secondary school students have commented to me how lacking in challenge their programs were in the senior primary school or intermediate years, as they are sometimes known in New Zealand. They enjoy the greater challenge of work at high school. At Hamilton Boys' High School up to 90 boys each year begin their NCEA Level 1 qualifications a year early in Year 10, and in Year 11 many, in fact most of these, take on the CIE international qualification, IGCSE. Many of our top students qualify for university entrance both through the New Zealand NCEA system and the CIE system. In Year 13 last year, we had around 60 enrolments in the New Zealand Scholarship examinations. Most of our academics, including those of Māori and Pacific Islands ethnicity, enjoy the additional challenge that our school program provides by comparison with most other New Zealand secondary schools. In the senior school our students have a range of 36 different subjects from which to choose. Our school has a program that provides both acceleration and enrichment for our top academics.

The teaching strategies used are also an important factor in providing effective programs. Boys I interviewed spoke particularly about the teacher's sense of humour, use of today's technology and feedback as being important.

At the heart of providing effective pastoral care to students are three important principles: help students discover their identity, communicate that you care about them and encourage them to take risks. Both parents and educators have responsibilities in these areas.

"Due to their isolation, uniqueness, feelings of not being normal, and self-analytic ability, many gifted youth experience severe identity problems regarding who they are and what they wish to become" (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 43). Being in touch with their cultural roots is a very important part of students discovering their identity, particularly in understanding who they are. Many Māori and Pasifika students spoke to me about how important it is for them to connect with their cultural roots through the language and/or performance aspects of their culture. What was pleasing to hear was that all the boys I interviewed in my PhD research considered the school valued their culture.

Many boys commented on the care given to them by both parents and teachers. One Samoan migrant father, for the past 3½ years has regularly dropped his gifted son at the university library to enable him to study there. With competition for the computer at home from other siblings, and no Internet access, this boy's father has decided that the best way to give him the support he needs is to drop him at the university library and collect him when he is finished. Many of the top Pacific Island academics, in fact, commented that their parents would do anything possible to provide them with the resources and support to ensure academic success. Many boys also commented on the way some teachers went out of the way to care for them. Many teachers are providing extra tutorials out of regular class time to help students achieve to their best. One Pacific Island boy recounted to me how his tutor teacher, also a Pacific Islander, loaned him his laptop because he had no computer available at home that he was able to use for his homework. Several boys also spoke about how they had been helped by teachers who were approachable and made themselves available to give extra help outside of normal classroom hours. Such care builds a relationship of trust that assists student achievement.

Davis and Rimm (2004) stated that a certain amount of risk taking is necessary for students to be able to achieve successfully in the academic field and in their careers. Unless they take risks they severely compromise their opportunities to succeed or to become leaders. As part of the EHSAS (Extending High Standards Across Schools Project) in which Hamilton Boys' High School was involved with two other boys' secondary schools, three weekend hui were held where ten top Year 9 and 10 Māori academics from each school got together to hear motivational speakers and participate in activities designed to challenge students to take risks, build team work and leadership capacity. One activity that has been recounted to me was learning to paddle a waka on Lake Rotorua. This was the first time many of them had done this. The boys went a long way out onto the lake and then had to turn for home and paddle into the wind in cold conditions. They had to keep on encouraging each other all the

way but arrived back with a sense of triumph and camaraderie. It is important that students have new and different learning experiences rather than sticking to the safe and familiar. It is also important that some of these experiences require them to overcome fears within sensible safety guidelines.

There are many factors to be considered in the identification of gifted and talented Māori and Pasifika students. From my experience and research three of the key factors are the search for personal identity, the conceptions of giftedness held by schools and teachers, and an awareness of the different social and cultural features of Māori and Pacific Islands students' home lives. Consider. What are you doing to encourage students to develop a strong sense of personal identity? How broadly based is your conception of what constitutes giftedness and talent? How well do your programs and pastoral care provision take into account the cultural and home backgrounds of your students?

One of the young men I interviewed is a shining example of a student who overcame a very significant obstacle to achieve as a top academic. He is a Pacific Island migrant. He came to New Zealand at the start of Year 10 having studied some English and being able to read and write in English to some extent but had never had a conversation in English. He recounted his first day in a New Zealand school to me explaining how the palangi had been talking to him in the playground and he didn't know what they were saying. Right from the start he was placed in the top Year 10 class based on some entrance tests the school did with him. He described how his first hour in class was so hard. He told me he never wanted to go to an easier class or give up but was determined to make it in that class. He asked his father and sister for help at home and studied at night until he could understand what he had been taught during the day. He put his success down to the support of his parents and sister, the care and support of teachers, believing in himself, never giving up and his Christian faith. Clearly this is a young man with a strong sense of personal identity who I believe will go places in life.

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