

---

# Introduction

---

Wilma Vialle  
University of Wollongong, Australia

One of the biggest challenges for the field of gifted education is to ensure that our identification procedures, programs, curriculum models, and educational practices are:

1. supported by the best research evidence available;
2. inclusive of all social and cultural groups; and,
3. respectful of different knowledge and belief systems.

Giftedness is not a static construct. Over the course of the twentieth century, we have observed a shift from views that conflated giftedness with IQ to the broader and dynamic perspectives reflected in Gagné's (2003) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent, Sternberg's (2003) model of successful intelligence, Gardner's (1983) theory of Multiple Intelligences, and Ziegler's (2005) Actiotope Model of Giftedness. Percentages of the population that may be regarded as gifted have likewise shifted from around 2% to 10%. A key message in this broadened and dynamic view of giftedness is that potential needs to be cultivated. In Australia and New Zealand, Gagné's model has been widely adopted in state and school policies and has been useful in drawing to the attention of educators, the need to provide conducive environments for talent to flourish.

Sadly, giftedness is still viewed in many quarters as an elitist undertaking, which does not sit well with egalitarian nations such as Australia and New Zealand. While giftedness, by definition, exists equally in all populations, we are still a long way from recognising this in practice. Indigenous students comprise one group that is still under-represented in educational programs for gifted students. This collection of papers focuses the spotlight on giftedness in indigenous populations.

The first chapter is a transcript of the keynote address delivered to the 11<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Conference on Giftedness, held in Sydney in mid-2010, by Professor Paul Chandler. Drawing on his own experience of perhaps being seen as more a problem child than a gifted student, Chandler reminded the audience that giftedness is a social construct. Thus, what is known and valued in one culture may not be exactly the same as that of the next culture. He challenged prevailing stereotypes of indigenous students and proposed that educators cultivate giftedness through programs that respect indigenous knowledge and belief systems. Such programs can respond to giftedness while being the "rising tide that lifts all ships".

In the following chapter, Jill Bevan-Brown examines indigenous conceptions of giftedness and draws comparisons among Māori, Navajo and Australian Aboriginal perspectives. This paper provides an important backdrop for the chapters that follow in the remainder of this book. In particular, Bevan-Brown's paper reminds us of the importance of understanding and respecting indigenous conceptions of giftedness in education. Like Chandler, she argues that including indigenous concepts of giftedness will benefit all gifted students, but also benefit general education. To assist schools in determining whether their practices reflect such an inclusive approach, Bevan-Brown provides a questionnaire to guide teacher reflection.

Chapters 3 to 7 focus on indigenous giftedness in Australia. John Munro focuses on the identification of gifted indigenous students, providing a strong rationale for the use of authentic assessments. He demonstrates the utility of such an approach in African populations and outlines how this can be adapted for use in Australia. Michael Christie's paper reports on his collaborative work with elders from the Yolŋu community in the Northern Territory. Christie's chapter sheds additional light on Aboriginal perspectives on gifted children and their education. Particularly important is the need for indigenous communities and mainstream school personnel to work together for the sake of the children. Again, the importance of understanding indigenous conceptions of giftedness is critical. The fourth chapter reports on a gifted program designed to engage indigenous primary school students so that their gifts can be realized. The Achievement Integrated Model (AIM) was developed by Bousnakis and colleagues at the Sydney Catholic Diocese for use in their schools and is currently being evaluated for its effectiveness. AIM builds on Graham Chaffey's Coolabah Dynamic Assessment model for identifying giftedness, and combines cognitive and affective components in its delivery. The following two chapters outline Chaffey's work and are reprinted from the *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*. Chaffey's research indicates that a dynamic model is effective in identifying gifted Aboriginal children.

The final chapters examine indigenous giftedness in the New Zealand context. A strong theme running through all these papers is the importance of identity and connection for indigenous gifted people. The first of these presents Melinda Webber's work, which attempts to reverse the negative stereotype of Māori academic outcomes. Webber draws on social identity theory to point to the synergy between Māori identity and high academic performance. Graeme Miller then draws on his experience in New Zealand secondary schools to consider some of the issues educators need to confront in meeting the needs of gifted Māori and Pasifika students. In addition to the importance of identity, Miller suggests that teachers and schools need to value the conceptions of giftedness held by differing cultural groups and to understand the home contexts of all students. Another practitioner, Taemanuolo Faaea-Semeatu, focuses on the cultural identifiers of giftedness for Pasifika students in New Zealand schools.

The final chapter in this book is not focused on indigenous gifted students per se. Rather, it looks at young people from low socioeconomic (SES) circumstances. The paper is included here because some of the challenges faced by children from low socioeconomic backgrounds share common ground with those experienced by indigenous students. Under-representation in gifted programs is one shared

experience. Nadine Ballam critiques the assumptions about the impact of low SES on the academic outcomes of young people. Again, the importance of identity is confirmed by Ballam's research.

## References

- Gagné, F. (2003). Transforming gifts into talents: The DMGT as a developmental theory. In N. Colangelo & G. A. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education (3rd ed., pp. 60-74)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sternberg, R. J. (2003). Giftedness according to the theory of successful intelligence. In N. Colangelo & G. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education (3rd ed., pp. 88-99)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Ziegler, A. (2005). The actiotope model of giftedness. In R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness (pp. 411-436)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.