

University of Canterbury

**‘Holding the torch’ for gifted and talented students in
New Zealand primary schools: Insights from
gifted and talented coordinators**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Teaching and Learning
in the University of Canterbury

Leigh Hannah Margaret Hurford

September 2013

ABSTRACT

The New Zealand Government recognises the importance of supporting all students in their learning to assist them to reach their full potential. This recognition is inclusive of gifted and talented students. Furthermore, boards of trustees, through their principal and staff, are required under the National Administration Guidelines, to demonstrate how they are catering for gifted and talented students. Notwithstanding this requirement, The Education Review Office (2008) report entitled *Schools' Provision for Gifted and Talented Students*, confirms that a major challenge for school leadership is sustaining momentum of gifted and talented provisions and programmes.

Despite this mandated intent, what happens in practice at the school level remains problematic. Teachers and schools welcomed the Talent Development Initiative (TDI), a Ministry of Education (MOE) Initiative, as it held some promise for developments in gifted and talented education. The first round of the initiative ran between 2003 and 2005 and the second from 2006 to 2008. Funding to support innovation and special developments in gifted education has been provided to 38 programmes nationwide. This initiative serviced some schools and educational bodies but a large number of others were left without an extra layer of support beyond their schools' leadership actions.

This study focuses on the school level, in particular teachers who are given additional responsibility, namely those with a coordination role. Moreover, my thesis is about how work to meet the needs of gifted and talented students can be sustained in schools to ensure the gifted and talented 'torch' can continue to 'burn brightly' over time.

To gain an understanding of coordinators' insights on what it takes to overcome the problem of sustaining provisions and programmes, this study adopts a qualitative, case study approach. I selected a purposive sample of six teachers with experience working in a gifted and talented coordinator role. The main source of data collection was individual semi-structured interviews (refer to Appendix A). I asked them questions about their role and how provisions were made for gifted and talented students at their schools. Further questions were asked about the support they received for their roles, particularly professional learning and development to enhance their practice.

My findings show the responses from participants highlighted the important connection between leadership and learning. Knowledge and passion to do their best for gifted and talented students, although important, was not sufficient. The leadership actions and support provided by others in their setting and beyond their setting were likewise needed.

My analysis revealed a range of strategies was deemed necessary to support the leadership of learning in classrooms, specifically the need for dialogue amongst teachers about identification, planning and evaluating provisions and programmes. All too often these gifted and talented coordinators worked alone in their roles, in isolation from others, and at times without the support they needed. Thus the success or failure of provisions and programmes for gifted and talented students rested on their ongoing commitment and drive.

My study includes recommendations for practice. These recommendations suggest that provisions for gifted and talented students must be integrated into curriculum delivery and learning areas and be part of schools' cultures in order for them to take hold and be sustained over time. Furthermore, there is a need to develop clarity of these provisions through job descriptions and for schools to undertake regular if not annual reviews of written documentation to guide ongoing work in gifted and talented education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been an incredibly exciting, challenging, frustrating, demanding, intense, fulfilling and very rewarding learning journey – all at the same time.

My sincere thanks to the six participants who willingly shared their thoughts, experiences and knowledge as gifted and talented coordinators on the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Without them allowing me to delve into what it is they do, why they do it and how they go about doing it, none of this research would have been possible.

Special thanks go to my senior supervisor, Dr. Susan Lovett. I am grateful for the support, honesty, and encouragement she constantly offered, but most of all for her patience! Not only did she ensure that I did not “miss the bus,” but she has enabled me to get on and travel in the right direction. Susan’s expert supervision has meant that I have finally reached my destination and I that I have managed to get off at the right stop!

I would also like to acknowledge my two previous supervisors, Jenny Smith and Myra Kunowski, who both made a valuable contribution to the initial stages of my proposal and research, but have since left the University of Canterbury.

Grateful thanks go to my associate supervisor, Sue Wilson, who came on board part way through my research journey. Her knowledge of the research process has been invaluable and she has instinctively known when and how to lift my spirits to keep me motivated.

My employing school and Board of Trustees supported my decision to pursue my interest in gifted and talented education and accepted an extension to my leave to enable me to concentrate on and complete my study. Specifically, I would like to acknowledge my principal and deputy principal (names omitted) for providing opportunities for me to deepen and extend my knowledge in practice.

I would like to acknowledge my extended family and friends who have supported and encouraged me throughout my research journey, of whom there are too many to mention.

To my very special Mum Aileen, who was willing to lend a helping hand whenever asked whether it be child minding or proof reading my work. Thank you for your timely and very much needed help and support.

I wish to acknowledge and thank my amazing husband Paul for allowing me to complete my thesis despite being the mother of two preschoolers. His unwavering support and encouragement along the way have been crucial. I could not have sustained my thesis work without him and truly appreciate the sacrifices he has made to allow me to complete my thesis.

Finally, to our two adorable children, Mason and Greta, who without even knowing it, have provided me with the determination to complete my study, I dedicate this research to you. You can have Mummy back now!

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Best Evidence Synthesis (BES): A series of best evidence synthesis iterations commissioned by the Ministry of Education.

Education Review Office (ERO): The New Zealand Government department that evaluates and reports on the education and care of students in schools and early childhood services.

Gifted and talented: Gifted and talented students are those with exceptional abilities relative to most other people. They have certain learning characteristics that give them the potential to achieve outstanding performance (Ministry of Education, 2002).

Gifted and Talented Education (GATE): A broad term for special practices, procedures, provisions and programmes used in the education of children who have been identified as gifted and talented.

Hui: A conference, meeting or gathering.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE): The programme undertaken as preparation for teaching.

Ministry of Education (MOE): The New Zealand Government's lead advisor for the New Zealand education system.

National Administration Guidelines (NAG): Set out statements of desirable principles of conduct or administration for specified personnel or bodies.

National Educational Goals (NEG): Statements of desirable achievements by the school system and statements of Government policy objectives for the school system.

Primary School: A school for children in Years 1 – 8.

Talent Development Initiative (TDI): A Government professional learning and development initiative to support innovation and special developments in gifted education.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

The focus of this study is to understand why the role of gifted and talented coordinators is often criticised for its short-term impact. This study is an attempt to identify strategies that can be deemed to work for the six participants in their specific settings. ‘Keeping the torch burning’ for gifted and talented students and sustaining provisions and programmes is an enduring challenge for coordinators. The Education Review Office (ERO) focused on this in their 2008 report, having concerns about momentum and sustainability. I supply four reasons as to why this is an ongoing challenge.

Firstly, gifted and talented students are entitled to receive effective support, guidance and learning opportunities in order to give them the chance to reach their full potential. It was Peter Fraser, one of New Zealand’s major political figures, who back in 1935 highlighted the moral obligation of the education system to cater for all types of learner, including those deemed gifted and talented. He considered education to be vital for social reform. It was his public recognition and celebration of student diversity that sowed the seed for schools to address the full spectrum of student needs. He claimed, “the Government’s objective, broadly expressed, is that all persons, whatever their level of ability, whether they live in town or country, have a right as citizens to a free education of the kind for which they are best fitted and to the fullest extent of their powers.” 78 years on and schools have a statutory obligation to demonstrate how they are catering for gifted and talented students.

Secondly, I argue that the quality of teachers’ professional learning and development in the area of gifted and talented students matters. Specific gifted and talented professional development initiatives, such as the Ministry of Education (MOE) Talent Development Initiative (TDI) form the launching pad for my data collection because the need to address these students does not stop when the TDI funding terminates. My thesis is an opportunity to grapple with the issue of how schools might sustain their focus on gifted and talented students following the end of formal, external professional learning and development.

Thirdly, teachers need to be equipped with sufficient knowledge and skills and know what effective practices are if they are to meet the growing needs and expectations of students with gifts and talents. An investigation of effective practices across a variety of school settings is one way of disseminating knowledge of practice in this area.

Fourthly, I acknowledge the need for schools to explore what they can do themselves to ensure a continuing focus on the gifted and talented student. This necessitates recognising that student learning is contingent on leadership practices which are closely linked to students and their achievements. I focus first on the designated coordinator role and through them, what supports are provided by school principals.

My Position

My interest for gifted and talented education stems from the opportunities I was given in my second year of teaching to further my studies prior to taking on the challenge of teaching a cluster of gifted and talented students within a mainstream classroom. Despite feeling positive towards the beginning of my gifted and talented learning journey, I quickly realised that I lacked knowledge and understanding necessary not only to effectively teach, but also to cater for gifted and talented students and relished the opportunity to learn more. Mutch (2005), affirms that researchers tend to follow lines of interest and want to develop expertise in the specific field in which they work. There was so much learning to be done, and I just had to learn more.

This initial gifted and talented learning evolved into a passion for working with gifted and talented students. This passion continues to intensify and I now consider myself an advocate for gifted and talented students. I feel extremely grateful to have more recently had the opportunity to work in a learning support role focusing specifically on gifted and talented students. My role in this part time position includes identification, working with teachers, withdrawal programmes for gifted and talented students, competitions, utilising external support in the form of experts and programmes, and of course some administrative tasks. I have found myself in the very privileged position to be able to link my work within school to my study.

Boards of trustees, principals, coordinators and teachers need to share a strong commitment to the provision of quality programmes for the gifted and talented student. I argue that there

is an urgent need for conducting and continuing research on gifted and talented education. Difficulty sustaining provisions for gifted and talented students is both a significant and recognised problem schools are encountering. Research in this area is one way that insights can lead to new knowledge and a better understanding about the ways in which gifted and talented provisions can be improved and sustained over a longer period of time.

This study will be of interest to primary school management teams, gifted and talented coordinators, classroom teachers, parents, boards of trustees and possibly the Ministry of Education. The New Zealand research literature on the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes is somewhat limited. I hope that this study will contribute to the literature base and enable more informed and accurate decisions to be made about gifted and talented provisions and programmes.

Research Questions

Main research question

How do mainstream New Zealand primary schools overcome the problem of sustaining quality gifted and talented education provisions and programmes?

Supplementary research questions

1. What challenges and obstacles need to be overcome by gifted and talented coordinators in order to keep the momentum for gifted and talented education programmes?
2. What strategies or key factors can be identified to address the challenges faced by gifted and talented coordinators in order to sustain and manage gifted and talented education provisions and programmes?

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter two explores the literature about gifted and talented educational policy and initiatives, teachers' professional learning and development for gifted and talented students and leadership and what it means to be a leader.

Chapter three sets out the research methodology adopted for this study, followed by a description of the research design, including the data collection method selected, the data analysis process, ethical considerations and strengths and limitations of the study.

Chapter four presents the findings from the interview data, which is organised around two main themes.

Chapter five is a discussion of these findings and includes links to literature.

Chapter six, the final chapter, concludes this thesis by returning to the research questions to present responses and also provides recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Overview

This chapter represents a review of the literature on the policy, provision and delivery of programmes to support gifted and talented students in the school system. There are three sections. The first section relates to gifted and talented educational policy and initiatives developed in the years 1998 to 2012 and outlines Government support for gifted and talented education. The second section focuses on the nature of effective professional development in general and more specifically for the improvement of teaching and learning for gifted and talented students. The third section focuses on leadership and the role of principals in the leadership of gifted and talented policy initiatives in schools.

Gifted and Talented Educational Policies

Historical perspectives

Gifted and talented education has taken a somewhat fascinating journey in order to arrive at the established policy we have today. The education of gifted students has intrigued practically all societies in recorded history (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Knudson, 2006; Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001). However, from an historical perspective, the emphasis placed on gifted and talented education has been incredibly inconsistent and somewhat neglected over the years (Knudson, 2006; Moltzen, 2011a). Riley (2002) likens gifted education to a 'roller coaster ride' while Moltzen (1996) has explained it as 'waxing and waning'. Similarly, Callahan (2004) acknowledges that growth in the field has not been constant or consistent. Literature recognises that gifted and talented education has certainly had its high and low points. Such sporadic and substandard attention given to gifted and talented education has made it more difficult to sustain such programmes.

Up until recently, there has been limited attention paid to meeting specific needs of those with higher abilities. Special provisions for gifted and talented students were viewed as undemocratic because it was felt they were privileged enough and therefore did not require any extra time, effort or money spent on them (Moltzen, 2011a; Thomson, 1984). Unfortunately, to some extent, this mentality is still prevalent today. A popular misconception is that gifted and talented students will make it independently, however, this

is not always the case. Tunnicliffe (2010) and Goodhew (2009) are two of many who have attempted to dispel the myth that ‘cream will always rise to the top’ recognising that many gifted and talented students require support in order to reach their full potential. Likewise, Colangelo and Davis (2003) agree that “many students labelled gifted do not make it on their own” (p. 5). More recently, changes have taken place in New Zealand and the need for special provision for gifted and talented students is continuing to gain a more widespread acceptance (Knudson, 2006; Riley, 2002). Gifted and talented education has begun to receive greater recognition and more emphasis is now being placed on meeting the needs of gifted and talented students within the New Zealand educational system. The Ministry of Education (2000) also affirm that “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” (p. 6).

Policy advancements and initiatives

Over the years two government agencies have made policies on gifted and talented students in schools. Prior to 1988 policy was influenced by the Department of Education and thereafter by the Ministry of Education. Knudson’s (2006) insightful research into gifted education in New Zealand primary schools suggests that the 1960s was a time when considerable financial commitment was centred on gifted students, yet since that time, support has been more ad hoc and harder to sustain.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education established a Gifted Education Advisory Group. The aim of this group was to explore issues and develop a set of National Guidelines. As a result, the handbook *Gifted and Talented Students: Meeting Their Needs in New Zealand Schools* was created in 2000 and distributed to all schools. The coming together of this advisory group ignited a new spark in gifted education that created a flow on effect to schools and teachers. The national guidelines established were not intended as a policy, but rather as a useful tool to assist schools with the development and implementation of gifted programmes.

2001 was a constructive and busy year for gifted education. It saw the appointment of advisers through School Support Services. Advisers were a valuable asset to gifted and talented education and were sought after by schools. As advocates for gifted and talented

education, advisers provided a wealth of knowledge, skills and some much needed inspiration to assist schools to get underway with meeting the needs of gifted and talented students. Their support was not restricted to the establishment of provisions. Advisers were also accessible on an ongoing basis to provide support to individual staff members and schools as a whole.

During 2001 the Working Party on Gifted Education was also established. This body replaced the former Ministry of Education Advisory Group on Gifted Education. The aim of the Working Party on Gifted Education was to provide advice on a new policy and funding framework for gifted education. It was envisaged that this policy and funding framework would contribute to durable solutions to the issues facing gifted and talented education and through the establishment a long-term plan for the proper organisation and effective resourcing of the sector (Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001). Included within this report was the vision statement for New Zealand's gifted and talented students, which stipulated:

All children have a right to an education that acknowledges and respects their individuality and that offers them maximum opportunities to develop their strengths and abilities. Gifted and talented children will flourish in a society that acknowledges and respects individual difference and recognises and celebrates the abilities of its most able (Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001, p. 1).

A set of core principles for gifted and talented education in New Zealand was also developed by the Working Party on Gifted Education (2001), one of which identifies that provision for gifted and talented students should be supported by ongoing high quality teacher education and development. The initiatives and recommendations within this report were made on the basis that all teachers ought to be considered as teachers of gifted and talented students due to the majority of gifted and talented students receiving a large part of their education in regular classrooms.

2002 saw the release of the Government's policy statement and direction relating to initiatives for gifted and talented students. This policy outlined the Ministry of Education's approach to education for gifted and talented students. It included provision for professional development, programme initiatives, gifted education research and preparation

of resources relating specifically to gifted and talented education. It was in this statement that a contestable funding pool for education programmes targeting gifted and talented students was identified. The inclusion of gifted and talented within this policy was yet another step in the right direction. Knudson (2006) agrees, stating that gifted and talented education has been taken to a new level of national commitment due to the recommendations.

The first cycle of TDI funding began in 2003, with another round beginning in 2006. A diverse range of initiatives with a wide variety of programme structures targeted at gifted and talented students received three years of funding and support. As Riley and Moltzen (2010) explain, the overall purpose of the TDI's was to provide funding to initiatives that would support the development of new approaches in gifted and talented education improving or enhancing provisions for students. A total of 38 New Zealand schools and educational bodies have been funded by the TDI (Moltzen, 2011a).

The New Zealand Government has recognised that gifted and talented students need appropriate educational opportunities. The National Education Guidelines, defined by the Education Act, comprise of five components. Included within these are the National Education Goals (NEGs) and the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs). Recognition given to the need to assist all children to realise their full potential has implications for individual teachers, gifted and talented coordinators and principals. It requires educational bodies to make decisions about exactly how it is they will provide appropriate educational opportunities for gifted and talented students.

In acknowledgment of the fundamental importance of education, the Government set National Education Goals for the New Zealand education system. Three of the ten goals in particular, resonate with gifted and talented students. The first is *"promoting the highest standards of achievement through programmes enabling all students to realise their full potential,"* the second is *"equality of educational opportunities by identifying and removing barriers to achievement,"* and thirdly *"programmes utilising clear learning objectives, monitoring student performance against learning outcomes and programmes to meet individual needs."*

Each board of trustees, through its principal and staff, is required to foster student achievement, use good quality assessment information to identify those who have special needs including gifted and talented, and develop and implement teaching and learning strategies to address the needs of all students, including gifted and talented. The NAGs relate to school administration and set out the Government's statements of desirable codes or principles of conduct. Boards of trustees have a number of statutory obligations under the NAGs and they are required to govern the school by following them. This requires boards of trustees to work collectively with their principal to ensure the needs of gifted and talented students are being met.

Specific government recognition of the importance of gifted and talented students was seen when an amendment was made to NAG 1c in 2005 to include the term 'gifted and talented students', thereby requiring all state and state-integrated schools to demonstrate how they catering for gifted and talented students. This specific mention of gifted and talented students within the NAG was a turning point because never before had provisions for gifted and talented students been mandated in New Zealand (Moltzen, 2011a). Up until the 1990s gifted and talented education had a very patchy history, but from there it has been more visible.

Despite the building momentum gifted education has seemed to gain, the Education Review Office (ERO) (2008) published a report that identified contrasting findings. The report, which presented findings from evaluating the provision for gifted and talented students in 261 primary schools and 54 high schools during Terms 3 and 4 of 2007, identified that most schools lacked programmes to match students' gifts and talents and that most provide only for academically gifted students. This is in despite of the acceptance of the broadening concept of giftedness and talent to include general intellectual abilities, academic aptitude, creative abilities, leadership ability, physical abilities, and abilities in the visual and performing arts" (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 12). The report went on to say that some had no provision at all, suggesting that while some progress has been made, there is still a lot of room for improvement.

A new Gifted and Talented Advisory Committee was announced in 2009 as a result of the new National led Government. This committee consisted of representatives from across the

sector and provided a forum for the group to engage on the future direction of gifted education.

Three providers were contracted to provide gifted and talented professional services to schools in 2010. Heather Roy, Associate Minister of Education, acknowledged that contributing to raising the achievement of all gifted students would be the challenge for these providers. A consortium of providers currently holds the contract to provide gifted and talented support for the years 2012 and 2013.

Although some obvious positive progress has been made for gifted and talented education, it seems to be mirrored by continuing criticism and debate about provisions for gifted education and the way in which gifted students are catered for (McAlpine & Moltzen, 1996; Riley, 2002). “While there seem to have been periods where the lot of the gifted in New Zealand has improved, many of the efforts have not been sustained” (McAlpine & Moltzen, 1996, p. 1). Moltzen (2011a) sums up the history of gifted and talented education in New Zealand with this statement:

After decades of widespread apathy and official neglect we seemed to be entering a new era in gifted and talented education. And in fact we did, albeit a relatively short one. Over the last two to three years the momentum has slowed and some significant gains made have since been lost (p. 26).

This brief historical review generates some uncertainty about the future of gifted and talented education in New Zealand and our ability to ensure the needs of gifted and talented students remain a priority on the educational agenda.

Professional Learning and Development to Support Students and their Learning

Professional learning and development

In general terms, professional learning and development is the process by which teachers review, renew and extend their commitment to teaching and acquire and develop content and pedagogical knowledge, skills, intelligence, abilities and deep understandings (Day, 1999; Dettmer & Landrum, 1998; Ministry of Education, 2000; Speck & Knipe, 2005).

Professional learning and development can take many forms consisting of meetings, conferences, presentations, observations, interviewing, university coursework, reading, release time, discussions and includes learning from experience, learning from practice, informal development opportunities and more formal learning opportunities. Day (1999) summarises such professional learning and development saying they consist of “all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom” (p. 4). Gubbins (2008) also acknowledges that professional learning and development can be a group experience that often requires active involvement and participation of some description but it can also be a solitary experience without any interaction.

Improving student outcomes and the quality of teaching are the main, if not, top reasons for professional development (Education Review Office, 2009; Education Review Office, 2008). Furthermore, it is believed that professional development is a critical prerequisite for raising student achievement by means of quality teaching (Alton-Lee, 2003; Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Speck & Knipe, 2005). Day (1999) discusses a 1996 American study by the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education. Findings identified that of the teachers surveyed, the main motivation for professional growth was to improve student achievement and this is also consistent with Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008). Evidence from the Ministry of Education (2000), Day (1999), Day and Sachs (2004) and Speck and Knipe (2005) suggests that in order to increase achievement, meet the needs of learners, reach standards and fulfil educational purposes, educators must be well prepared and must also be able to maintain and improve their contributions to education through continuous learning. Day (1999) reveals that efforts have been made to ensure all teachers undertake regular in-service professional development to remain up to date with the many facets and continuing changes to teaching and learning.

Having access to up-to-date information, knowledge and strategies to support the teaching and learning of gifted and talented students is imperative not only for educators, but for the students themselves. The Working Party on Gifted Education (2001) identify all teachers as teachers of the gifted because of the high possibility that every teacher will encounter a gifted learner in their classroom at some stage during their career. Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that gifted and talented students spend the majority of their learning in a regular

mainstream classroom (Bate & Clark, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2000; Townsend, 2011). For this reason, as well as the NAG requirement, teachers must be well prepared to be able to meet the needs of all types of students, including the gifted and talented. It is essential that gifts and talents are recognised and nurtured to ensure that students with these special abilities have the opportunity to reach their full potential (Ministry of Education, 2000, 2008; Renzulli, 2011; Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001).

Within education, it is recognised that teaching is an extremely complex process and therefore the necessity for professional learning and development is well understood and documented (Alton-Lee, 2003; Day, 1999; Dettmer & Landrum, 1998; Fink, 2005; Gubbins, 2008; Knudson, 2006; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). Day, Calderhead and Denicolo (1993) concur that as pressures placed upon teacher training have intensified in some countries, it has created a flow on effect to professional learning and development. For years, professional development has been studied. Yet despite research suggesting the importance of professional development, encompassing how it is carried out, its relevance, timing, provider and how change is created and links back to practice, the subject has been, and continues to be hotly debated. Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008) agree that while student learning requires improvement and one obvious solution is to improve and enhance teacher knowledge, attention is needed to decide the best ways to go about improving teacher knowledge.

Professional learning and development for gifted and talented education

At a general level, there is a growing body of international literature and research around professional learning and development. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for professional development focusing specifically on gifted and talented education. Literature and research in this area is somewhat limited. “There are even less research data on the effectiveness of alternative formats of professional development in gifted education” (Gubbins, 2008, p. 538).

In New Zealand however, it is believed that gifted and talented education is a worthy and necessary recipient of professional growth and development (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Education Review Office, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2000; Riley, Bevan-Brown, Bicknell, Carroll-Lind, & Kearney, 2004a; Timperley et al., 2007). Moreover, the Ministry of Education (2000), among others, recognise that “professional development is an essential

ingredient in developing, implementing, and maintaining effective programmes for gifted and talented students” (p. 10) and furthermore, for improving student outcomes.

Elsewhere in the United Kingdom, Day (1999), a professional learning and development advocate, believes teacher development is the only way to assure the quality of learning opportunities, and just like all students, gifted and talented students are in need of quality learning opportunities. Historically, the professional learning and development needs of teachers were relatively simple and occasional in-service training was offered at the discretion of the principal (Dettmer & Landrum, 1998) who made the decisions regarding learning priorities. As time has gone on and schools have progressively become more complex, the demand for skilled and knowledgeable teachers has increased and approaches have of necessity, required alteration.

A report prepared for the Ministry of Education by ACNielsen (2004) concludes that positive learning outcomes for students occur from a combination of things including teacher skills and expertise. The importance of meeting the needs of gifted and talented children has more recently been acknowledged and strategies put in place to ensure this happens. The National Association for Gifted Children believes that it is an entitlement of gifted students to be served by professionals who have an ongoing involvement in professional development. The impact of professional development can be so great that even students are able to perceive the differences between teachers who have participated in gifted and talented professional development opportunities and those who have not (Colangelo & Davis, 2003).

Initial teacher education and in-service development

The New Zealand Ministry of Education has identified the necessity of gifted and talented professional learning and development, stating that it is imperative. Likewise, Colangelo and Davis (2003) imply quite simply that professional development for teachers of the gifted and talented works. The necessity of both initial teacher education and in-service professional learning and development as a means to “equip practicing teachers to cater appropriately for gifted and talented children” (Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001, p. 4) is corroborated by the core principle stating provision for gifted and talented children should be supported by high quality teacher education and development (Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001). This recognition of more opportunities for professional

development resulted in a recommendation being made to the Ministry of Education to recommend to all initial teacher education providers to include content aimed at preparing pre-service teachers to understand and meet the needs of gifted and talented students. However, despite this recommendation, Riley et al. (2004a) recognise that gifted education is rarely addressed comprehensively within teacher education institutions, and Moltzen (2011a) acknowledges that little has changed, with those responsible for initial teacher education making no major shifts in response to the expectation.

In research funded by the Ministry of Education focusing specifically on the inclusion of gifted and talented education content in initial teacher education, Riley and Rawlinson (2008) conclude that although its inclusion is more than a one off lecture, the content is not comprehensive. Concern regarding the sustainability of gifted and talented education provisions and programmes becomes understandable when importance and priority is not given to gifted and talented education during initial teacher education or in-service professional learning development. According to Knudson (2006), “gifted education in the schools depends on the quality of professional development available to principals and teachers” (p. 214). Heather Roy, previous Associate Minister of Education, also reiterated the importance of initial teacher education and in-service professional learning and development contributing to the successfulness of gifted and talented education programmes saying:

Effective teacher training must be a three-pronged approach. Initial teacher training is the first, and too often students graduate without appropriate training – practical or theoretical – to cope with the range of needs present among students. The second is professional development. This happens well in some schools but in others, is very limited and often gifted and talented education is the poor cousin along with special education. Finally, professional leadership from principals and other leaders is crucial in ensuring gifted and talented education is a priority (Roy, 2010).

Continuous professional learning and development

Day (1999) and Timperley et al., (2007) agree that professional development regarding what is learned and how it is learned needs to be a joint responsibility between teachers, schools and the Government. Moreover, professional learning and development needs to be continuous. Fullan (2007) goes as far as saying that successful schools are those that

understand the importance of teacher-teacher and teacher-student connections and that this occurs as a result of routinely engaging in continuous learning. Such a view is not new. In 1985, Day, Johnston and Whitaker recommended that professional development be ongoing and occur continuously within the school setting. Furthermore, Speck and Knipe (2005) maintain that continuous learning is fundamental to meeting the demands of a changing and diverse student population in a rapidly evolving world. Akhavan (2005) has written that in-school professional development is of the utmost importance. Dettmer and Landrum (1998) also advise that schools must take responsibility for the development and implementation of professional learning and not depend solely on others to tell them what they need to know and do. Any programme of professional development needs to be contextually based to reflect current policies and practices within individual schools (Dettmer & Landrum, 1998).

National versus local professional development

Gifted and talented professional development can be implemented from a national or local level. The Ministry of Education has initiated several substantial professional development projects in recent years including the Literacy Professional Development Project, Numeracy Project, Assess to Learn, Information Communication Technologies, Extending High Standards and the gifted and talented TDI.

The TDI is one form of more recent gifted and talented specific professional development that can be used to make comparisons to the literature as a way of identifying what is working effectively and areas for improvement. The TDI was made available as part of the Government's policy on gifted and talented education. Applications to be part of the TDI were open to schools and organisations focused on improving outcomes for gifted and talented students. The Government recognised and supported the fact that innovative programmes often require extra support to get off the ground.

There is an increasing trend towards school-based professional development, where the programme reflects the nature and needs of the individual school" (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 10). Professional development should occur in the school and be run by staff at the school (Reeves, 2009) which will increase participation. These ideas are consistent with that of Mitchell and Sackney (2000) who advise that sending teachers out for professional development will not necessarily improve professional learning or generate change. It is

imperative for all staff to be involved, take responsibility, have accountability, build a mutual understanding and work together (Dettmer & Landrum, 1998).

Characteristics of effective professional learning and development

There is general consensus within the literature about which types of professional learning and development are most effective and also the school-level conditions, which help and hinder development (Day, 1999; Day et al., 1993; Day et al., 1985; Gubbins, 2008; Riley et al., 2004a; Speck & Knipe, 2005; Timperley et al., 2007). Gubbins (2008) states that “for several decades professional development and its implementation has been the subject of debate” (p. 535). Mitchell and Sackney (2000) agree, but moreover, point out that there is less agreement around exactly how to structure professional development or connect it with improved professional practice. This suggests that professional development must be more than a desirable intent but rather matched to the unique realities of the contexts they will address. The importance and necessity of professional development is constantly hampered by research suggesting that what is known to be effective is not always practiced and that schools are not engaging in beneficial professional development (Dettmer & Landrum, 1998; Gubbins, 2008; Timperley et al., 2007). It is not simply that schools realise the necessity of meeting the needs of teachers and students, but rather how to do so which seems to be the problem. In order to address this issue, it is important to identify beneficial and effective forms of professional learning and development and unpack exactly what it is, namely the conditions that will make it effective. Effective provisions require more than ‘what’ knowledge is required, taking into consideration ‘why’ and ‘how’ that knowledge should be acquired. Therefore, schools need to consider a range of professional development conditions in order to plan a way forward for their provision of programmes to identify and support gifted and talented students if they are to address the ‘how best’ to proceed issue.

Speck and Knipe (2005) identify what they believe are seven critical elements and associated key components necessary for high quality professional development that will bring about change. The seven elements include a focus on improving student learning, assessing needs, establishing goals, centring on the learner, sustaining growth, requirement of resources and evaluation of progress in relation to set goals, all of which could be useful for planning and implementing gifted and talented professional development. When using professional development as an agent for change, Day (1999) believes it must involve

learning that challenges emotional and cognitive competencies as well as personal and professional values which underpin these. Consideration must be given to other factors including the timing and relevance of professional learning and development given that schools have multiple agendas at any given time.

High quality effective professional development is a sustained collaborative learning process. This is supported by Speck and Knipe (2005) maintain that “effective professional development has multiple opportunities, is diverse, and provides for an ongoing process as it actively engages the educator in learning” (p. 12). Timing, relevance, participant involvement, professional learning communities and understanding adult learning and developmental phases are all important conditions that contribute to planning and implementing effective professional learning and development programmes. It is necessary at this point to unpack these in order to be able to build a picture of how to make professional development effective.

Factors that impact the effectiveness of professional learning and development

One size professional development does not fit all, and although research has reached a consensus that onetime professional development is ineffective, it is still often used and as a result, what is known as effective is not always practised (Day, 1999; Timperley et al., 2007). There are four main factors associated with impacting the effectiveness of professional learning and development. They are one off sessions, the timing and relevance of professional learning and development opportunities, and participant involvement.

Fullan (2007) believes the lack of opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and sustained learning is a problem with professional development. He goes on to make the point that teachers need to be learning every single day. This strengthens similar claims made by Speck and Knipe (2005) that one off professional development sessions may be of little benefit. “It is generally accepted that one-off workshops rarely changes teacher practice sufficiently to impact on student outcomes” (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xxv). One off workshops tend to be good consciousness raisers but are not good practice changers. Speck and Knipe (2005) are of the opinion that a broader and more complex approach to professional development is required. Specific school settings will also influence the conditions required to ensure professional development is successful.

When considering professional development as a tool for improving the quality of teaching and making changes to practice to improve student achievement, the time given to professional development opportunities and its relevance become important factors needing consideration. Many short-term professional development bursts do not help teachers improve the quality of learning for children and little change comes about as a result (Day, 1999; Dettmer & Landrum, 1998; Speck & Knipe, 2005; Timperley et al., 2007). Moreover, Reeves (2009) acknowledges that teachers require time to implement great ideas so they can become a reality rather than remaining a fantasy. Timperley et al. (2007) examination of eight case studies revealed a similar concern about the timing of professional development.

Despite all the negativity towards one off professional learning and development sessions, the Best Evidence Synthesis cautions that extended professional learning and development opportunities are not necessarily more effective than one-off opportunities. In saying this, they allude to the complex interplay of many factors that make professional learning and development opportunities successful or not. Another factor that can impact on the effectiveness of professional learning and development is participant involvement. This should be taken into account when planning professional learning and development for teachers.

Active participation in professional learning and development is imperative (Day, 1999; Dettmer & Landrum, 1998; Gubbins, 2008; Timperley et al., 2007). “Participants must expend considerable time and energy if they are to benefit from it fully” (Dettmer & Landrum, 1998, p. 72). If teachers are not involved and engaged with the professional development, they are less likely to commit to the outcomes.

Learning alongside others

There is much writing within professional development literature about the importance and necessity of collaboration and networks for support (Alton-Lee, 2003; Day, 1999; Day & Sachs, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Speck & Knipe, 2005; Timperley et al., 2007) and this resonates with professional development specific to gifted and talented education. Collaboration is a function of leadership, a way in which principals can not only encourage staff to work collectively together rather than individually in isolation but also to foster collective leadership. MacBeath and Dempster (2009) acknowledge that there are

benefits for distributing school leadership. Collective or distributive leadership can be much more effective than individual leadership. From a leadership perspective, collaboration is necessary for building a critical mass. A critical mass is imperative for gifted and talented education provisions, especially if these provisions are to be sustained over time. “When leaders recognize the broad knowledge of teachers and commit to constructing collaborative processes to enable teachers to share that knowledge, they create a culture that nurtures continuous improvement and learning” (Speck & Knipe, 2005, p. 16). Therefore, collaboration has a part to play in fostering gifted and talented education within schools. As Robertson (2008) puts it, “all members of an education community can contribute to the leadership energy needed to achieve its vision and goals” (p. 20). Day and Leithwood (2007) discuss that forming a critical mass begins with the emergence of a shared sense of direction in which the principal is required to influence members of the school community to move in that direction.

Professional learning communities are one form of collaboration. “In a learning community, people of all generations and all positions are teachers and learners, simultaneously” (Speck & Knipe, 2005, p. 29). Findings from Timperley et al. (2007) identify participation in some form of professional learning community as a common feature. The learning community concept has become increasingly more popular and with good reason. A different approach to professional learning and development has been necessary to address the mysteries, perplexities and problems associated with teaching and learning. “The idea of teacher communities has been embraced by educators all over the world as a way of meeting the challenges of improving schools in this fast-changing global society” (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008, p. 234). Fullan (2007) has called for a radical shift to move away from professional development as it is known and towards ongoing learning within learning communities. With this growing body of knowledge gaining momentum, learning communities promoting professional learning in ways that impact positively on student learning are considered essential as it is recognised that effective learning communities are fundamental to the change process. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) also highlight links between a learning community and leadership. People within a school form not only a community of learners, but also a community of leaders.

In saying that however, Timperley et al. (2007) caution that in some cases participation in learning communities can be detrimental. Simply giving teachers time to talk will not bring

about change and may do nothing more than reinforce the ineffective status quo. It should also be noted that a learning community might not be a comfortable place to work. The stakes are high if meeting the needs of all students is the intended outcome. Within the Best Evidence Synthesis, Timperley et al. (2007) describe two conditions which characterise effective learning communities capable of impacting positively on student learning. Firstly, giving support which allows participants to process new understandings and implications for teaching and secondly, the impact of teaching on student learning. This has implications for gifted and talented education. These learning community conditions could be of benefit for gifted and talented professional learning and development. The need for inclusive and collaborative professional development for gifted and talented education is consistent with that of general professional development.

Dettmer and Landrum (1998), The Ministry of Education (2000) and Timperley et al. (2007), agree that successful gifted and talented professional development will increase interest in and a commitment to gifted and talented education. Dettmer and Landrum (1998) also acknowledge the need for an inclusive and collaborative approach to gifted and talented professional development. Learning communities are a way to share knowledge, understandings and change beliefs. The influential work of Mitchell and Sackney (2000) presents a number of ideas which underpin the construct of a learning community including “wholeness and connections, diversity and complexity, relationships and meaning, reflection and inquiry and collaboration and collegiality” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 6). Day (1999) identifies three essential purposes of a learning community, which consists of helping individuals to achieve, building a broad rather than narrow knowledge base, and be part rather than apart from the community and society. Sapon-Shevin (1994/1995) agrees that learning communities are a way of providing support, breaking down the barriers of professional isolation and in turn distributing leadership.

Adult learning and developmental phases

Knowledge and understanding of adult learning theory offers a lens for analysing what can help and hinder teachers’ professional learning and development. A number of studies including one by Day and Sachs (2004), suggest that teachers pass through different developmental phases during their teaching career, and therefore learn in different ways at different times. Teachers who are at different points in their career have characteristically different needs regarding growth and development. This further strengthens the argument

that one size professional development does not fit all. Having an understanding and awareness of adult learning characteristics and developmental phases is important and necessary when working with a school staff who are almost certainly all at different stages of their career and development. In saying that however, application of the understanding is critical when planning and implementing professional development to ensure it is relevant and challenging for all staff involved. Speck and Knipe (2005) assert that teachers are likely to be more committed and interested when their needs have been taken into consideration.

While characteristics of adult learners and the way in which adults learn has similarities to that of students, there is one distinct difference, namely that adults are more likely to make decisions. Adults are more empowered in the learning process, have greater choice and are able to better articulate their needs on an equal footing with teaching colleagues. However, Gubbins (2008) suggests similar strategies that are applied to assist children with learning and should be reciprocated with adults engaging in professional learning and development. “Educators recognize the benefits of having students actively involved with learning; the same opportunity for learning must be provided for educators” (Gubbins, 2008, p. 540). Professional learning and development, according to Dettmer and Landrum (1998), is cyclical in nature and four key phases for a typical professional development programme are identified. These phases include preparation, design, implementation and evaluation.

Dettmer and Landrum (1998) also stress the importance of lifelong learning. “Learning is a lifelong process for everyone, and extended learning is especially needed by educators whose primary mission is to help others learning” (Dettmer & Landrum, 1998, p. 13). Teachers must demonstrate a commitment and enthusiasm towards lifelong learning for two very important reasons. The first, as already discussed is obviously to maintain and extend teachers’ professional knowledge and secondly, to act as a positive role model for students. “Continually expanding on teachers’ current knowledge about learning and development provides the foundation of lifelong learning for educators” (Speck & Knipe, 2005, p. 16). Day (1999) believes a learning community is necessary to develop a love of lifelong learning. Professional learning needs to last beyond the meeting or professional learning and development session. The goal is for the learning to last and support teachers’ practice over time. Sustainability has become a term attached to the literature themes of professional learning and improvements to practice.

Professional learning and development as an agent for change

Change is a product of professional learning and development that is well documented. A study of professional learning and development necessitates a focus on change and improvement strategies. Inherent in all forms of teacher professional development is the notion that teachers will change as a result of participation (Opfer & Pedder, 2013). According to Gubbins (2008), “professional development is the vehicle of educational reform (p. 555) however, change is potentially one of the most complicated components. Speck and Knipe (2005) write “educators need to explore the change process for sustaining educational improvement, recognizing the simplicity of the concept and the complexity of implementation” (p. 5). Some insight into the complexities of teacher learning and development is provided by Day (1999). He recognises that change is a necessary outcome of effective professional development and admits that change is both unpredictable and dependent on a number of contributing factors including attitudes, past experience, willingness, abilities, social conditions and institutional support. Unless change is perceived to be relevant and necessary to the needs of students, and teachers are ready to engage in change and feel supported, they will be unlikely to give it more than the minimum effort and attention required (Day, 1999). This is consistent with Timperley et al. (2007) who emphasise the importance of particular beliefs and values, knowledge, skills and practices and desired outcomes and the effects these personal theories can have on change. Furthermore, Day (1999) also agrees, writing that “change at deeper sustained levels involves the modification of values, attitudes, emotions and perceptions, which inform practice” (p. 98).

Attitudes towards change

Change is hugely reliant on the mindset participants have towards professional learning and development and is unlikely to be successful without participation and a sense of ownership with the change process (Day, 1999). A powerful reason is needed to engage with new information and subsequently to change practice. Unless the change is perceived as relevant and necessary, participants are likely to lack interest, motivation and effort (Day, 1999; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009; Timperley et al., 2007).

Understanding and being aware of barriers that hamper change is important. Knowing about these barriers could contribute to ones ability to improve the effectiveness of gifted and talented professional development. Generally speaking, Speck and Knipe (2005) infer

that comprehensive professional development has tended to be somewhat shallow over the past twenty years. Although teachers have been provided with a plethora of opportunities for professional development throughout their teaching careers, concerns continue to be raised over the usefulness and effectiveness of the ways in which professional development is structured and executed. Gubbins (2008) explains efforts to promote professional development have been continuous, at times without a clear understanding of the impacts. Due to a variety of contributing factors, a vast amount of professional development is limited in its ability to bring about change (Day, 1999; Dettmer & Landrum, 1998; Gubbins, 2008).

Change can be influenced on two different levels, the micro and the macro. Micro meaning the specific school setting in which gifted and talented coordinators have knowledge and understanding of the setting, take responsibility and will often use internal professional learning and development to lead staff and implement change. Roth (2012) refers to this as teacher-led change. Macro is the wider national scale incorporating Government policy. According to Bishop, O'Sullivan and Berryman (2010), "educational reform needs to happen at a number of levels including the classroom, the school and the education system" (p. 14). Using international comparisons, Edwards (2012) findings suggest that it is the macro level predominantly responsible for making major influential change as opposed to the micro level.

Political influences on change

Levin (2008) suggests that political dynamics can have a great deal to do with the direction, success and sustainability of change. He stresses the importance of remembering that politics has a lot to do with "whether the right changes get adopted, whether they are efficiently supported and whether they last long enough to make a real difference" (p. 74). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) warn that governments are usually supremely over confident about their own power to manage and reform institutions and people. Edwards (2012) identifies a different concern about government led initiatives, saying that often they do not respect local conditions.

As Levin (2008) explains, elected politicians have a responsibility for shaping large scale reforms. "Since education has assumed high political visibility, governments everywhere have felt compelled to promise improvement and to take action to fulfil such promises"

(Levin, 2008, p. 74). When a reform is initiated, more often than not, it will receive a short-term influx of resources and professional development, among other forms of assistance to facilitate implementation including funding.

Gifted and talented education in New Zealand has witnessed first hand the power of politics. The inclusion of gifted and talented students in the statutory National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) was a precursor to the Government's gifted and talented TDI. Forms of assistance including resources and professional learning and development were provided in the TDI and could be viewed as a way to ensure its success. However, over time, the assistance dissipates as the external support is withdrawn. This is supported by Bishop et al. (2010) who explain that "reforms tend to flounder once external support and funding are withdrawn, personnel and policies shift and competition for internal resources grows" (p. 15). Furthermore, Timperley et al. (2007) warn that "long-term impact is likely to be more important than short-term gains" (p. 218).

Resources are another way of assisting schools and teachers to implement change in order to improve practice for gifted and talented students. The resources tend to inform practice, enabling schools and teachers to transfer the Government's vision, idea and theory for gifted and talented students into practice.

Resources

The Ministry of Education has developed various gifted and talented specific resources. The resources have been developed to support not only schools and teachers but also parents and caregivers, in recognition of the importance of home – school partnerships. The overall aim of the resources is to assist gifted and talented students to reach their full potential academically, emotionally and socially.

Gifted and Talented Students: Meeting Their Needs in New Zealand Schools was the first of two Ministry of Education publications. Intended for educators, all schools received copies of this book in 2000. This resource focuses specifically on assisting with the development of a gifted and talented programme, and begins by looking at definitions, characteristics and identification of gifted students. Information on programme development and evaluation is also detailed and includes some essential elements of gifted and talented programmes. Since its original publication, this resource has been revised. The 2012 revised version is

only available electronically and not in print, which may impede rather than assist the visibility of gifted and talented education resource dissemination.

In 2008, the second Ministry of Education resource entitled *Nurturing Gifted and Talented Children* was published. This resource is more holistic than the first, focusing on a parent – teacher partnership as a way of ensuring the best educational opportunities for gifted and talented students.

Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI), a Ministry of Education initiative, was first launched in 1998 as an online resource for New Zealand schools and students. Information, resources and curriculum materials can be accessed on this bilingual education portal. An update in 2010 saw the addition of new features, which were further expanded in 2011. TKI has continued to grow and now supports over 60 online communities and collections. It has become somewhat of an essential part of teaching and learning within New Zealand. Gifted and talented is one of the learning communities on TKI. This site has useful, relevant and up to date information for schools and teachers, parents and caregivers and students. Different sections including upcoming events, a resource exchange, webinars, interact and what's new, can be easily accessed.

Advisory Support

In an article pertaining to gifted and talented educational policy within New Zealand, Ministry of Education employees McDonough and Rutherford (2004) explain that funding was provided by the Government to employ twelve specialist advisers through School Support Services as a way of supporting schools in their ability to support and cater for gifted and talented students. They go on to discuss the role of the advisers to support schools in their development of gifted and talented policies and practices through professional development programmes. Advisers became, and more so have proven to be an invaluable resource for gifted and talented education. Unfortunately, 2009 saw the demise of advisory services as we had come to know them. Anne Tolley, previous Minister of Education, made cuts and changes to advisers and advisory services with the backing of John Key (Prime Minister). The new focus was based around reading, writing and mathematics for National Standards. All of a sudden, an experienced and knowledgeable resource base was no more.

Since the demise of advisory services, professional learning and development support for gifted and talented education has taken a different form. Providers have had opportunities to apply to lead professional learning and development. 2012 and 2013 has seen a consortium of providers lead Ministry of Education funded gifted and talented professional learning and development designed to help teachers identify and respond to the needs of gifted and talented students in the classroom.

Financial Support for Gifted and Talented Provisions and Programmes

Financial support is always a contentious issue. Often funding, or more importantly, the lack thereof is given the blame and used as an excuse for the non-existence of gifted and talented programmes within schools. However, those who use this excuse may be too quick to do so, without investigating possible solutions. In reality, there are some schools and educational bodies who have managed to run gifted and talented programmes on a shoestring for a number of years, albeit with great difficulty. The fact of the matter is that leaders who are supportive of provisions for gifted and talented students will offer support in numerous ways and will often find funds when needed. Neglecting to consider or explore different possibilities and options potentially signals poor leadership and management. Furthermore, as Timperley et al. (2007) suggest, “it is not the funding or support that made the difference so much as how these resources were used” (p. 72).

Nevertheless at national level, the NAG relating specifically to gifted and talented sits amongst other highly funded groups including literacy, numeracy, Māori and special education. While the gifted and talented NAG has been highlighted yet it has not been funded to the same extent the other groups have been. This is yet another area of struggle and concern for gifted and talented education and is contributing to the difficulties faced by gifted and talented coordinators and schools. Resourcing and financial support for gifted and talented education is still an issue. It is sporadic and not continuous and as a result it becomes very difficult to sustain gifted and talented programmes to the same or better level over a longer period of time.

Sustainability

The word sustainability is defined as an adjective used to describe the ability to maintain or keep going continuously ("The New Zealand Oxford Pocket Dictionary," 2005). Fullan

(2005) refers to sustainability as “the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose” (p. ix).

While Fullan (2005) describes what sustainability is, he argues that there is no precise definition of sustainability, and certainly this rings true within writing on the topic. Waite (2003) adds strength to this claim, suggesting that “the term sustainability means different things to different people” (Waite, 2003, p. 82). In saying that however, Elias (2008) states there is “broad agreement that sustainability is a label that can be applied to an innovation that lasts for a number of years beyond its inception” (p. 66). The challenge facing those responsible for gifted and talented programmes is exactly how to ensure provisions last for a number of years beyond inception, because, as Davis and Rimm (2004) inform us, “gifted programmes come and go; the record of continuity is dismal” (p. 452). Timperley et al. (2007) state that any definition of sustainability should include reference to ongoing professional learning that, in turn, will lead to continuing improvement. There are, in fact, a number of ways that can support sustainability.

Louis (2008) is continuously struck by the variety of ways in which sustainability may occur – and its fragility. Sustainability may occur or be affected by any combination of conditions including professional development, principals, leadership roles and responsibilities, learning communities and political influences. But in saying that, it is important to recognise that one condition alone may not necessarily be enough to ensure sustainability. These conditions make up key areas of the literature review. In combination, these components serve to ensure provisions for gifted and talented are maintained over time.

Reeves (2009) discusses strategies to help sustainability of initiatives. Although his work discusses sustainability of initiatives in general terms, it is easily related to gifted and talented education. Reeves (2009) challenges readers to ponder this question regarding sustainability. “If funding evaporated and administrative mandates were withdrawn, would this change endure?” (p. 123).

The book ‘Scaling Up Educational Reform’ attempts to understand how to develop an education reform programme that is both extendable and sustainable. Although it focuses primarily on the disparity between European and Māori, Bishop, O’Sullivan and Berryman

(2010) acknowledge that while addressing the disparities that affect Māori, they can also help others. Gifted and talented students are a minoritised group and therefore the findings in this text are particularly compelling. Within this text, a theoretical model to ensure a reform can be sustained is presented. The acronym GPILSEO is used to describe the essential elements of a reform initiative, which must be present from its inception. The seven elements represented by GPILSEO are goals, pedagogy, institutions, leadership, spread, evidence and ownership. Each element consists of a focus and detail and can be applied to a variety of levels including the classroom, school and system wide (Bishop et al., 2010). Whether or not provisions for gifted and talented education are sustainable depends somewhat on leadership actions and processes to keep interest alive so that learning is ongoing rather than completed at any time.

Support from school management has a great deal to do with whether or not professional development will be effective. What leaders say and do matters. The Education Review Office (2009) vindicate the importance of the quality of principals' leadership and management for schools' professional learning and development programmes thereby endorsing the influence of school leadership on student and teachers' learning.

Leadership

Day and Leithwood (2007) believe that the substantial amount of research on leadership makes it evident that leadership matters. Likewise, researchers worldwide tend to agree upon the importance of effective leadership within education (Fink, 2005; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Linsky & Lawrence, 2011; Robinson et al., 2009). However, perspectives of effective leadership differ considerably. The writing on effective leadership within literature elucidates that provisions and programmes for gifted and talented students can be affected by what it is leaders do, or in some cases, neglect to do. "There is a widespread belief among politicians and members of the public that school leaders make a critical difference to the quality of schools and the education of young people" (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 35).

What is leadership?

Linsky and Lawrence (2011) stress that "leadership is an activity, not a person" (p. 6). It is essential to understand that the term leadership encompasses two components involving leadership as the activities and actions and the leader as the person. Agreeing with Linsky

and Lawrence (2011), Robertson (2008) identifies that leadership is the informed actions of a leader, which influences the continuous improvement of learning and teaching. Furthermore, Leithwood, Aitken and Jantzi (2006) suggest that “it is through leadership that the power to accomplish the work of the school is enacted” (p. 93). Leadership is about working through people for people. Leithwood, Aitken and Jantzi (2006) recognise that it is about building a shared sense of direction for the school and influencing people to move in that direction. Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) take this further in the Leadership and Student Outcome Best Evidence Synthesis. They discuss not only what leadership is but also what educational leadership is. “Defining educational leadership involves starting with educational purpose because by doing this we come back to what it is that actually motivates leaders” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 69).

Moreover, an enormous quantity of literature has been devoted to leadership as a set of practices. Day and Leithwood (2007) recognise that most who have studied effective leadership have established a set of similar categories of basic leadership practices. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) offer one set of leadership qualities and practices in support of their claim that “almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices” (p. 6). They consider leadership to involve the application of four common practices, which include building a vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the teaching and learning programme (Leithwood, Day et al., 2006). However, they do warn that the implementation of these practices must be context specific.

Effective leadership

Often the word ‘effective’ is used to describe successful leaders and leadership. It seems to be a common belief among researchers that successful and effective leadership is pivotal to most other good things that happen in schools (Leithwood, Aitken et al., 2006). There seems to be a consensus around what constitutes an effective and successful leader, but there are limited and differing viewpoints on the practices necessary to reach this status. Fink (2005) gives a reason for these differences recognising that one’s understanding and view of leadership reflects who you are, what you are, and where you are in time and space. Because leadership is influenced by personal beliefs, values, and specific contexts, labelling it as effective can be problematic. Perspectives on effective leadership can differ. Day (2000) recognises that effective leadership can vary depending on the different lenses being

looked through. According to Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999), what leaders do depends inherently on what they think and believe. Furthermore, they affirm that qualities will never tell anything important about how to exercise outstanding leadership because outstanding leadership is very context sensitive and specific (Leithwood et al., 1999). Glickman (2002) stresses that “identities of self and how those identities influence the perspectives of others can have a powerful impact” (p. 3).

What it is a leader does, will impact on others, filtering through the school community like a ripple, eventually reaching gifted and talented students. So rather than looking at what it is that constitutes effective leadership, which is fraught with difficulties, some clarity can be gained from viewing effective leadership as making a difference for students and improving outcomes through better learning opportunities. In other words, linking leadership with learning. Robinson et al. (2009) have succeeded in identifying the dimensions of school leadership that makes a difference for students. These dimensions can be linked directly to the needs of gifted and talented students. Teaching and learning is at the heart of effective and successful leadership. Robinson et al. (2009) affirm that “effective educational leadership requires in-depth knowledge of the core business of teaching and learning” (p. 47). It is based on the main function of improving learning opportunities, student outcomes and achievement (Bishop et al., 2010; Notman, 2011; Robertson, 2005, 2008).

When considering effective leadership relating to sustaining an educational reform Bishop et al. (2010) advise that effective leadership must take ownership of the reform, in this case, provisions for gifted and talented education. They go on to say that taking ownership involves using data to identify the learning outcomes of gifted and talented students and the “implementation of processes to ensure this information is disseminated and acted upon” (p. 109). Bishop et al. (2010) use the GPILSEO model to provide seven summary statements of effective leadership, all of which, when employed, contribute to ensuring that provisions for gifted and talented education are sustained over time.

These summary statements advocate leaders:

1. Establishing and developing specific measurable goals so that progress can be shown, monitored over time and acted upon.
2. Supporting the development and implementation of new pedagogic relationships and the interactions in the classroom.

3. Changing the institutional framework, its organisation and structure, to support the reform within the schools.
4. Needing to be knowledgeable about their role in the reform.
5. Needing to spread the reform to include all students, teachers and the community.
6. Developing the capacity of people and systems to produce and use evidence of student experiences and progress to inform change.
7. Ensuring that the ownership and responsibility or authority for the goals of the reform must shift to the school or system (p. 109).

Educational leader qualities

Robertson (2008) provides a useful insight into the qualities of an educational leader. She affirms, despite there being many qualities associated with educational leaders, there is only one goal - improving learning opportunities. She maintains that “we need leaders who can work in a complex, ever-changing educational context, who are aware of the social and political influences on their work, and who can draw on this knowledge when working with others to create necessary changes to systems and practices” (p. 41). The message coming from Robinson et al. (2009) is that “the closer educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students” (p. 47). This further highlights the important link between leadership and learning.

Direct and indirect leadership

Leadership can be either direct or indirect. Direct leadership involves a principal monitoring achievement in order to get results. Indirect leadership refers to other steps in the process or layers of influence that indirectly impact on results and include activities such as modelling or classroom visits. In the School Leadership and Student Outcomes Best Evidence Synthesis, Robinson et al. (2009) describe direct and indirect leadership as influence processes saying, “this influence can be direct, as when leaders interact with others, or indirect, as when they change the conditions in which people work” (p. 36). Moreover, Bishop et al. (2010) inform that “leadership activities have an overall purpose which is to directly or indirectly reduce educational disparities through improving student outcomes” (p. 96).

The Principles of Leadership for Learning

MacBeath and Dempster (2009) endorse the need to connect leadership with learning through five principles. The five principles are ‘a focus on learning,’ ‘an environment for learning,’ ‘a learning dialogue,’ ‘shared leadership’ and ‘shared accountability.’ This set of principles provides a useful lens for realising what it is that school leaders can do to ensure schools are places of learning for teachers and students and also some clarity about leadership.

Principle one - A focus on learning

MacBeath (2009a) sends a clear message about the need to focus on learning. It is the first principle because “everything else rests on its foundation” (MacBeath, 2009a, p. 74). A focus on learning encompasses teaching with a focus on learning and a focus on professional learning. However, the principle stretches well beyond students and teachers as it also encompasses organisational learning and system learning (MacBeath, 2009a). It is important to stress that “a commitment to focusing on learning grows in strength when it is made the schools primary focus” (MacBeath, 2009a, p. 83).

Principle two - An environment for learning

When thinking about an environment for learning it is necessary to understand that while it incorporates the material spaces and resources or equipment, it is underpinned by the “knowledge, attitudes and skills of the staff and of the students, the teachers’ feelings for their charges and the value the school places on learning” (Dempster & Bagakis, 2009, p. 92).

Principle three - A learning dialogue

This principle highlights the need for leaders to show a commitment to learning, embrace it and make it a priority and this is done through an intentional focus on the way they converse about learning with teachers and students. Language is a very powerful tool. It connects people, enabling shared meanings and common purposes to be developed. Dialogue is essential if a leader’s aim is to create a shared meaning, common vision and helpful strategies. Swaffield and Dempster (2009) maintain when leadership and learning are intrinsic to the roles that all play within a school, these aims cannot be achieved without dialogue. This principle has a number of purposes, one of which is to involve people from

different levels of the school as a way to put such concepts such as distributed leadership into action.

Principle four - Shared leadership

Shared leadership has moved to the forefront of the educational leadership literature, moving aside other individual or hierarchal forms of leadership. When discussing shared leadership, consideration should be given to the variety of ways it can be viewed in different settings. It can be recognised as delegation, a bottom up approach or even as teamwork.

Principle five - Shared accountability

Shared accountability must focus on learning and requires all staff to be accountable to each other. This shared approach to accountability necessitates finding and maintaining a balance between meeting external accountability pressures while at the same time using internal accountability strategies such as self-evaluation. It is important for schools to tell their own story as opposed to allowing accountability to remain an external demand. Self-evaluation must be embedded at classroom and school level, but also extend to parents and the community. Developing shared accountability “requires a commitment to understanding the inner workings of the school and the significance of school-led evaluation” (MacBeath, 2009b, p. 153)

There is additional author support on the connections between leadership and learning. From Southworth’s (2009) point of view, the number one focus a leader should have is learning so that this intent is modelled, monitored and discussed. Within the majority of research and particularly New Zealand research devoted to professional development and leadership, inextricable links between leadership and learning emerge. The previously mentioned report published by the Education Review Office (ERO) in 2008, following a review of a selection of schools on the quality of education provided for students with particular gifts and talents, made numerous recommendations for improvements. Of particular interest were two of the recommendations made to school leaders to designate a person or team to lead the school’s provision for gifted and talented students and promote ongoing participation in school-wide professional development, including specialist training and development for people specifically responsible for gifted and talented education (Education Review Office, 2008).

Various authors (Davies, 2011; Robinson et al., 2009; Southworth, 2009) argue that principals should be visible as learners and not just as leaders. The role a school principal takes in promoting and supporting professional development is critical. Effective leaders will actively support the professional learning of their staff. This may include developing a learning culture within their school where they participate in professional development as a learner rather than being identified as an organiser of others' learning (Timperley et al., 2007). "Principals and other leaders need to be present and involved in professional development activities to learn, understand, and support new learnings" (Speck & Knipe, 2005, p. 16). Further support for these ideas is evident in the meta-analysis carried out by Robinson et al. (2009). The impact of five dimensions of leadership on student outcomes was examined. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development produced the largest effect size, which was twice that of any of the other dimensions. The way leaders promote and participate in professional learning and development is therefore a key function of effective leadership.

Building Leadership Capacity

Shared leadership

One of the most important roles for effective leaders is to develop leadership in others because as Robertson (2008) points out "effective educational leadership requires much more than any individual leader can attempt to do alone" (p. 42). This is consistent with Robinson et al. (2009) who acknowledge that "it is unrealistic to expect any one leader to possess all the knowledge, skills and dispositions to a high level" (p. 47). Shared leadership requires a large number of staff to have involvement with the work of others, decision-making and knowledge creation and transfer. "Leaders see the strength of collective input within a professional community" (Notman, 2011, p. 140). This highlights that when only one person within a school setting is responsible for the gifted and talented education programme, and that person leaves, the chance of the discontinuation of the programme is high.

Leadership for gifted and talented students

Leadership for gifted and talented students who have special or different educational needs is crucial. "Informed, capable school leadership is an essential prerequisite for the development of a suitable learning environment for children and young people who have been identified as experiencing special educational needs" (Reeves, 2009, p. 127).

Leadership is one way to ensure the improvement of outcomes for gifted and talented students through appropriate provisions and programmes.

The aforementioned 2008 ERO report identified that school leaders from approximately half of the schools reviewed were enthusiastic about supporting the achievement of gifted and talented students. However, while it may seem to be relatively easy to make such claims, it is more difficult to action them. “When schools claim that they are committed to achievement but systematically deny their most needy students their most effective teachers, then their claims of commitment are undermined by their policies” (Reeves, 2009, p. 107). As a result, over the years there have been numerous calls for teachers and schools to improve their performance and become more accountable (Leithwood, Aitken et al., 2006; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). These demands typically emerge from legitimate concerns that students may not be learning what they should or as much as they should in existing situations and that school personnel are not efficient in their practices (Timperley et al., 2007).

We must acknowledge as does the literature, the potential of gifted and talented students to contribute to the nation as adults (Bishop et al., 2010; Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001). “Children are the living messages that we send to a time we will not see” (Postman, 1983, p. xi). They are our future, and for this reason alone, we need to do all that we can to ensure gifted and talented students receive the best possible education to allow them to reach their full potential. Tomorrow’s promise is in today’s schools, and it must not be ignored (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 3).

In this chapter I have reviewed the literature related to professional learning and development and leadership for learning, with a focus on gifted and talented education. The next chapter describes the methodology and research design of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

DESIGNING THE RESEARCH

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present details of the decisions made regarding the thesis design, including the methodology, settings and participants. It includes an explanation of why particular decisions were made to ensure transparency and trustworthiness. The chapter begins with a brief outline of the methodological theory base that supports a qualitative methodology along with the data gathering methods. I then justify the case study approach explaining the selection and setting of each case as well as introducing the participants of my study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Research Design

When it comes to social science research, interpretations of what constitutes knowledge and understanding are many and varied. Individuals possess different views about the nature of social reality (Creswell, 2013) which are derived from the ways people live and interact with others in a social world to form their preferred beliefs and actions. The nature and kind of knowledge they acquire depends on those experiences. It is subjective, meaning it is shaped through the filter of each person's lens. This is termed epistemology.

My research study included interviewing as my main method to glean personal accounts and perceptions of gifted and talented education practice. I asked semi-structured questions to gain individual views and considerable emphasis was given to these views. Collecting participants' individual accounts and perceptions on the provisions for and sustainability of gifted and talented programmes was of importance for teachers involved in the field to be able to explain how it is such programmes were constructed, experienced and continued. I did not set out to test hypotheses but rather to understand my participants within their work settings of the school and classroom in which programmes for gifted and talented students are provided.

Opie and Sikes (2004) advise that the decisions a researcher makes regarding methodological choice and use are significantly influenced by where the researcher is

coming from. My recent experience working with gifted and talented students has given me the impetus to try and make sense of how teachers help themselves to sustain gifted and talented provisions and programmes by working together in schools and maximizing learning communities. This study focuses on the participants' views, their reality, and their connection with gifted education. That is why my data gathering was solely about collecting their voice. Therefore, qualitative research suited my study because it gathered rich, narrative descriptions of participants' lived experiences.

It is however, important to realise there will always be factors that may influence, impact on and possibly even shape participants' experiences. Giving consideration to this and the fact that sustainability is the focus of the study, it was necessary to be aware of and understand the history of resource and programme support. There are a considerable number of released recommendations, mandatory obligations, policies, opportunities for professional learning and development, funding and various documents which have provided sporadic emphasis and interest to the field. However, all of these influences have emanated from Government policy, and are viewed as 'top down'. Therefore, the reason for collecting the personal voice of participants for this research was to obtain information from the bottom up, from those involved at ground level.

Qualitative Methodology

When choosing a methodology, a great deal of thought is given to the most appropriate procedures with which to assist answering research questions of a research study. The aim of my study is to not only construct knowledge about the necessity of professional learning and development combined with the role of school leadership for gifted and talented provisions, but also to generate a renewed understanding about sustaining provisions for gifted and talented education. In order to do this I have drawn on the experiences of participants who have had considerable involvement with coordinating or continuing provisions for gifted and talented programmes. Capturing particularity by allowing participants to tell their own stories and valuing the quality of information obtained meant I was able to clarify how it is such programmes for our gifted and talented students are sustained.

After taking into consideration the research questions, aims and the focus for investigation, a qualitative methodology within an interpretive paradigm has been chosen for my study.

As Crotty (1998) explains, qualitative research is the design that shapes the choice and use of particular methods and links them to the desired outcomes of the research. I have selected a qualitative methodology because of a number of its associated characteristics, referred to by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) as naturalistic, descriptive data, concern with process, inductive and meaning. I now explain and develop each of those characteristics in turn.

Naturalistic

A definite strength of qualitative research is that it is naturalistic, which gives great importance to the actual research location. It is more likely that natural behaviour will be captured in the natural setting because context has an effect on behaviour. Therefore, qualitative researchers go to participants rather than extricating them from their everyday worlds (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) affirm that “qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with context” (p. 4). Obtaining data embedded within a real context not only illuminated similarities and differences one would expect to see between each case school but also meant I was able to gain an understanding of what worked well in specific settings and in some cases what hampered provisions for gifted and talented programmes. Bell reiterates that “all organizations have their common and their unique features” (Bell, 2010, p. 9), and sharing such insights relating to what worked and why that might be was of particular importance for the focus of this study, again highlighting the necessity of the natural setting. Furthermore, sharing the participant’s story through lived experiences in a real and authentic context, allowed participants to be open and honest about the challenges and complexities associated with sustaining gifted and talented provisions and programmes.

Descriptive data

Rich descriptive data can be collected from seeking to understand individual’s perceptions of the world by uncovering the lived reality or socially constructed meanings of participants (Bell, 2005; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Davidson & Tolich, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Mutch, 2005). Within qualitative research the data comprises rich, narrative descriptions which are used not to prove something, but rather to understand what is occurring and why. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest, qualitative data is made up of words containing quotations in narrative form. I used this rich and descriptive narrative data to make sense of and describe how provisions and programmes for gifted and talented

students can be sustained with an aim of making it easier for others to reach and maintain this sustainability status.

Concern with process

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), “qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products” (p. 6). Being concerned with process enabled me to investigate how the mandatory expectation to meet needs of children with gifts and talents is translated into daily activities and procedures within specific school settings. Furthermore, focusing on process provided an opportunity to explore the impact professional development and leadership had on the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Sustaining gifted and talented programmes is a process within itself and Bell (2010) believes attempting to identify various interactive processes at work is important in order to be able to show “how they affect the implementation of systems and influence the way an organization functions” (p. 9). Dissemination of information and knowledge about an effective and continuous programme to meet the needs of gifted and talented students would not be possible without first learning about the interactive processes responsible for determining how and why provisions are as they are within particular school settings.

Inductive

Whether inductive or deductive logic is used helps divide quantitative from qualitative research (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Quantitative research is usually deductive and qualitative research inductive. Davidson and Tolich (1999) advise that “quantitative and qualitative research have different starting points because they assume different things about the world” (p. 19). A strong personal interest is often the starting point for inductive logic. This study was inductive because I have had experience working with gifted and talented children and it was a strong personal interest and curiosity that were driving factors for undertaking this study. Inductive logic moves the researcher from curiosity, through data collection, to developing formal theory (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Put another way, Walliman and Buckler (2008) describe induction as going from the particular to the general. Furthermore, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative researchers are inclined to analyse data inductively. This means that rather than searching out specific data in order to prove or disprove a hypothesis, the qualitative researcher considers all data to be pieces in a puzzle that require piecing together in order to be able to see the bigger picture. This

process was suited to my study because the intention was to gather as much specific information as possible to be able to make general statements about how it is gifted and talented provisions and programmes can be sustained.

Grounded theory

Inductive logic and grounded theory work well in partnership and complement each other. The combination of the two has assisted with building a strong qualitative methodology for this study. Grounded theory gets its name from developing a theory or explanation that is 'grounded' in the views and data from participants. Creswell (2012) explains the procedures for developing a grounded theory as a process of collecting interview data and then developing and relating themes of information in order to be able to compose a figure or visual model portraying a general explanation. It is from this general explanation that reductive statements about the experiences of individuals can be constructed (Creswell, 2012).

I have tentatively attempted to use a grounded theory design as it links extremely well with the reason for and necessity of my study. Providing statements about the experiences of individuals is not only a way to disseminate knowledge but will hopefully provide valuable generalised information to those in the field about what it takes to sustain gifted and talented provisions and programmes and how to do so.

Meaning

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stress the importance meaning has to the qualitative research approach. Qualitative researchers are concerned with what Bogdan and Biklen (2007) refer to as 'participant perspectives' and how it is different people make sense of their lives. Participant perspectives were essential for the context of this study as the focus was to learn from those who have experienced the organisation and facilitation of gifted and talented programmes. The idea behind 'meaning' also links with epistemology and the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is a more complex idea for what Bogdan and Biklen (2007) call meaning.

Interpretivism

My research can also be described as interpretive. Interpretive is often considered as a synonym for qualitative research and focuses on how people create meaning in their social

world in order to describe and interpret specific situations. It differs from the quantitative methodology which the positivists adopt favouring the use of statistics rather than personal experience and perceptions. Bassey (1999) offers a simple yet thorough explanation of an interpretive researcher as one who “cannot accept the idea of there being a reality ‘out there’ which exists irrespective of people, for reality is seen as a construct of the human mind” (p. 43). Interpretivism is not about objective knowledge associated more often with quantitative research, but rather is about understanding and is seen as subjective and contextualised.

The interpretive approach used for this study encompasses “the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds” (Davidson & Tolich, 1999, p. 26). I chose the interpretive approach because it was more flexible, adaptable and responsive to the participants. The emphasis was on building a rapport with my participants rather than testing their knowledge. Being in the gifted and talented field was an advantage as it aligned me with the participants and meant I did not go in to the research field as a complete stranger. I was able to be empathetic and sympathetic as I have an understanding of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. I simply asked participants to share their experiences so I could record and make sense of them and in turn find any emerging patterns and themes.

Phenomenology and the interpretive paradigm

Phenomenology is another approach that enables the researcher to investigate the lived world or experiences of participants. Phenomenology is a complex system of ideas that were derived from Edmund Husserl in 1900, and are associated with the works of others including Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Alfred Schutz (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is a theoretical perspective related to the social sciences. A number of researchers including Bassey (1999), Taylor and Bogdan (1998) and Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) make similarities between phenomenology and the interpretive paradigm. For this reason I am tentatively drawing on and incorporating aspects of phenomenology for my study.

According to Bassey (1999), phenomenology is more or less an alternative label for the interpretive paradigm. More specifically, Merriam (1998) suggests that “in the conduct of a

phenomenological study, the focus would be on the essence or structure of an experience” (p. 15). The focus of this research on the lived experiences of coordinators and their work to sustain gifted and talented education programmes, fits within the interpretive paradigm because as Taylor and Bogdan (1998) explain, “the phenomenologist or interpretivist, is committed to understanding social phenomena from the perspective of participants” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2000) states that “phenomenological and interpretive paradigms of social science research will emphasise the importance of settings, of individual perceptions, of attitudes, in short, of ‘authentic’ testing” (p. 131). In this study I interviewed those who have experienced and been involved with gifted and talented education programmes. Identifying key elements and strategies relating to the ways in which gifted and talented education programmes are sustained provided interesting and valuable information that can be disseminated in order to help others in a similar situation.

Case Study as a Research Approach

A case study approach was selected for this study for several reasons. Firstly, most literature suggests case study research is usually suited to the interpretive paradigm. “Case studies frequently follow the interpretive tradition of research” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 183). Secondly, “case study has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations, for evaluating programs, and for informing policy” (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). A third reason is because “contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report on the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 181). The focus of my study on the provisions and programmes for gifted and talented children is inherent within a real life context. Lastly, as Yin (2009) explains, the need for case study usually arises out of the desire to understand a complex social phenomenon. Gifted and talented education is certainly a complex topic.

Merriam (1998) and Yin (2009) discuss a case study as the detailed examination of one setting. Yin (2009) provides a definition of case study as “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon, set within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). In his more recent work, Yin (2012) reiterates the compelling feature of case study research is its ability to produce an invaluable and deep understanding of the case or cases and create new learning about real-world behaviour and its meaning.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) advise that choosing to do a case study is not so much a methodological choice but rather a choice of what or who is to be studied. The case may be studied in a number of ways and for this study as previously discussed, the cases will be studied using a qualitative methodology.

Types of case study

There are various forms of a case study approach. According to Stake (2005), case studies can be identified as intrinsic or instrumental. The intrinsic case study is concerned with better understanding a particular case whereas an instrumental case study is the examination of a particular case to provide insight into an issue (Creswell, 2008; Stake, 2005). Whilst this study is interested in understanding each particular case, the main concern is to examine each case with the intention of gaining an insight into the sustainability of provisions and programmes for gifted and talented education with a specific focus on best practices, the necessity of professional learning and development, and the impact of leadership.

Single or collective cases

Case studies do not have to be limited to the study of a singular case. “A number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition” (Stake, 2005, p. 445). The study of a number of cases is commonly referred to as collective case study (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005; Wellington, 2000). Basically, a collective case study is an “instrumental case study extended to several cases” (Stake, 2005, p. 446). In my study, a collective case study has been purposefully selected for what it can reveal about the phenomenon of sustaining gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Each case will be introduced individually within this chapter.

The aim of this study was to portray ‘what it is like’ to be in a particular situation. The study was concerned with ‘how’ and ‘why’ and the research questions reflect this. As Yin (2012) suggests, “case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed” (p. 1). In this case, the particular situation is the sustainability of gifted and talented education programmes within mainstream primary schools and clusters. By using a case study approach, my intention was to catch a close up view of reality and create a thick description of participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings towards sustaining gifted and talented provisions and programmes within the context of their specific settings. A case study method was chosen so that contextual conditions were

covered. The participants and their setting were pertinent to the phenomenon of study. There were five settings for my cases.

Manamana School is a state contributing school for students in Years 1 to 6. It has a decile rating of 10. Manamana School has approximately 430 students.

Ponga School is an independent single sex school catering for girls from Years 1 to 8. It has approximately 200 students.

Raupo School is a large state contributing school that caters for students from Years 1 to 6. It has approximately 490 students and has a decile rating of 5.

Harakeke School is a full state primary school that caters for students from Years 1 to 8. Students learn in a well-resourced and supportive learning environment. It has a decile rating of 10 and approximately 600 students.

Kohia Cluster is a cluster group for gifted and talented students, in which approximately 15 to 20 schools are involved.

Method

Interviewing

An interview is simply a conversation with a purpose which is to uncover and gain an insight into the lived experiences of others, reveal realities and provide information (Schostak, 2006; Seidman, 2006). Therefore it was a given that interviewing would be used for this study. Furthermore, the decision to interview was made as interviewing is considered one of the most common and best forms of data collection to obtain required information (Merriam, 1988). Semi-structured interviews comprising open-ended questions were conducted with each participant in order to illuminate their experience and understanding (Mutch, 2005; Wellington, 2000) of sustaining gifted and talented programmes within their specific school or cluster setting. In the semi-structured interview, certain information is desired from all the respondents, (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Merriam, 1988) however, participants were able and invited to add new ideas on the topic. “Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (Merriam, 1988, p. 73). The interviews conducted occurred face to face and a list of

questions determined prior to the interview guided the interview (refer to Appendix A). Each interview was recorded using a dictaphone because “this practice ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis” (Merriam, 1988, p. 81).

Procedures

Selection of participants

A number of schools and cluster groups operate gifted and talented programmes, some of which have been doing so for a number of years. Participants for this research were specifically and carefully selected using non-probability sampling. Davidson and Tolich (2003) identify non-probability samples as those which “deliberately seek certain types of elements because those cases are judged to be typical of some case of interest to the researcher” (p. 118). Stake (2005) recognises that cases are often of prominent interest prior to formal study commencing and that collective case studies require cases to be chosen. Therefore, the non-probability technique employed for this study was a purposive sample. “Purposive samples are selected because they suit the purpose” (Mutch, 2005, p. 50). The participants of this study were chosen with the intention of being able to get a better understanding about sustaining gifted and talented programmes operating within schools and clusters.

Accessing participants working within a school required first and foremost permission from each school. I then made contact with the gifted and talented coordinators to gain their individual consents to be involved in my study. Each participant agreed to take part in a semi-structured interview. One factor was taken into consideration when choosing the most well suited participant and this was the staff member with the most involvement in the gifted and talented education programme, typically one with a designated role as a coordinator. I now introduce each of the participating teachers whose real identity is protected by pseudonyms.

Participant - Lorraine

Lorraine is an experienced teacher with an array of achievements in the education sector including approximately six years classroom teaching, teaching at tertiary level and a Masters of Education degree. Other achievements include facilitating adult education and parent education courses and running another programme devoted specifically to gifted and talented children. Lorraine’s passion for gifted and talented education evolved through her

gifted daughter who was assessed at six years of age. At the time of her daughter's assessment, Lorraine realised she knew very little about giftedness and talent and as a result had an overwhelming desire to learn as much as possible in order to be able to meet the needs of gifted and talented children.

Participant - Sandra

After completing her secondary level teacher training in New Zealand, Sandra went overseas to pursue other interests before returning to begin her teaching career. She has taught in a number of secondary schools. Sandra's keen interest in gifted and talented education stemmed not only from teaching a group of very intelligent students who lacked motivation for learning but also from her own son. On her return from parental leave, Sandra took up a job share teaching position and it was at this time she really wanted to understand gifted and talented education. She quickly realised that her son displayed gifted characteristics so also had a personal reason to act as motivation for learning about gifted and talented education. As a result, Sandra resigned from her secondary school job to enable her to complete a postgraduate certificate in education. While studying, Sandra took up a part time gifted and talented position in a primary school.

Participant - Andrea

Andrea's interest in gifted and talented education began in 1993. Looking for an interesting challenge, she decided to do a paper based on teaching children with higher abilities in the classroom. As a result of her enthusiasm and excitement, the school in which she worked doing Reading Recovery, allowed her an hour per week to work with gifted and talented children. Becoming increasingly frustrated with both the lack of time and low number of children, Andrea started a cluster group for gifted children, bringing children from four or five schools around the district together. Following the establishment of this cluster, Andrea took up a gifted and talented coordinator position in another school with the intention of building the interest, knowledge, and understanding of gifted and talented education.

Participant - Kathryn

Kathryn is an experienced teacher with over twenty four years experience. She taught for four years before having children and then had a break from teaching for nine years. Since

returning, Kathryn has been teaching for twenty years. Kathryn has had experience teaching at all primary school levels.

Participant - Pam

Pam is also an experienced teacher, who has worked in education for over twenty years. The majority of her twenty years experience has been in the classroom, however she is also Reading Recovery trained. Pam has been an art specialist and GATE specialist for the past twenty years. Pam has always held a classroom teaching position, predominantly in Year Three to Year Six while carrying out these specialist roles.

Participant - Lydia

Lydia's teaching career began 1974. She has taught mostly in the one city, although had four years in another city, which she said had been a wonderful revitalizing and learning time. Since then, she has remained at the same school for twenty years. Prior to that, Lydia had taught at ten different schools in ten years. Lydia has taught at all levels from New Entrants through to Year Eight and has thoroughly enjoyed them all, however has specialised a lot in Year Three and Four. Lydia's interest for gifted and talented education emerged after being persuaded to be involved with the TDI journey her school was going to embark on. Her passion for gifted and talented education has developed and she is now an advocate for children with gifts and talents. As well as being involved with the TDI professional development for three years, Lydia has attended several gifted and talented conferences, symposiums, seminars and workshops.

Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the gathered data to increase understanding and present findings to others (Bogdan & Biklen 1982). Being able to form and articulate the criteria used for the winnowing and sorting process is crucial in order to give readers a basis for understanding the process and for it to have public credibility (Seidman, 2006). Initially, to begin the data analysis process, collected data was transcribed word for word because as Seidman (2006) suggests "to work most reliably with the words of participants, the researcher has to transform those spoken words into a written text to study (p. 114). Wellington (2000) advises that often transcribing will provide a massive amount of data, too big to analyse or report on, however, the amount of data collected from participants for this study was manageable in terms of transcribing. More

importantly, transcribing all data was an imperative part of this study with the focus on rich data and lived experiences. Studying the interviews was an important part of this research process particularly because getting participant experiences was a significant focus in order to try and understand what it takes to sustain provisions and programmes for gifted and talented students. However, I made a conscious decision to leave in depth data analysis until all interviews were completed and I chose to do so to ensure that I was in no way influenced by what I had gained from completed interviews.

I maintained an open attitude whilst reading and re-reading each transcript, which allowed me to identify important and interesting aspects as they emerged from the text. Seidman (2006) endorses this technique stating “the interviewer must come to the transcript prepared to let the interview breathe and speak for itself” (Seidman, 2006, p. 117).

Following the initial reading and re-reading, I began the task of extracting and organising interesting information from the transcript. According to Seidman (2006) organising excerpts from the transcripts into categories is a conventional way of presenting and analysing interview data. Passages of interest were marked during this stage of the process and judgment was exercised about significant and interesting pieces of information relating to the focus of the study.

Mutch (2005) discusses the term thematic analysis as a means of analyzing text and explains “the most common approach to analyzing text is thematic analysis” (p. 176). Thematic analysis was used for this study. This form of analysis is a qualitative strategy, which involved finding categories from patterns and themes that emerged from the interviews. Initially, the text was examined and key words, phrases and passages were used to capture items of interest, similarities and differences. Interesting passages were then grouped into themes by thinking about the subject of the passage and identifying a word to describe it and subsequently a theme into which the passage may fit. This process is known as classifying and coding the data.

Care was taken to ensure that any labels or key words identified as interesting were not forced into themes. Seidman (2006) identifies this as one danger with thematic analysis. “The researcher will try to force the excerpts into categories, and the categories into themes

that he or she already has in mind, rather than let them develop from the experience of the participants as represented in the interviews” (p. 128).

Ethical Considerations

According to Mutch (2005), ethics is an underlying sense of morals or a particular code of practice. Walliman and Buckler (2008) agree, stating “ethics is about moral principles and rules of conduct” (p. 30), and in addition also offer a very simplistic and general description of ethics as being concerned with ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. It is important researchers are mindful that participants know what their involvement means and that safeguards to protect their confidentiality and anonymity are also put in place. Stake (2005) likens qualitative researchers to guests in the private world of the participants. He further adds, “their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” (Stake, 2005, p. 459).

There are a number of ethical considerations one must be aware of when embarking on a journey of research. Authors including Davidson and Tolich (2003), Mutch (2005), Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) among others, provide a selection of basic ethical principles for researchers to follow and use as guidelines for research practice. Despite the availability of numerous sets of ethical guidelines, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) insist that ultimately, the tough ethical decisions reside with the researcher and will be influenced by personal values, beliefs and judgments of right and wrong. Taking these points into consideration, I chose to use the ethical guidelines of Mutch (2005) which cover informed consent, voluntary participation, right to withdraw, permission, coercion, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, participant safety, researcher safety and dissemination.

Confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and participant safety

The safety of participants was my prime concern. Each individual participant and the school in which they worked were given pseudonyms as a way of ensuring anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study.

All the information the participants provided was only seen by and remained confidential to my supervisors and myself. Transcriptions of data, documentation and notes have all be securely stored out of sight in a locked filing cabinet in my home. Transcriptions and notes have also been stored on my computer, and backed up using a flash drive device, which I

have kept in a locked filing cabinet. All data will be destroyed after the five-year requirement of the university.

Despite the care and attention given to ensuring the anonymity of participants, Mutch (2005) cautions that at times it may be difficult to keep a person's identity anonymous due to their high-profile role. Whilst I did everything I could to ensure anonymity it would be irresponsible of me not to mention a potential issue with doing so for this research. The field of gifted and talented education is relatively small which in turn restricted the number of those who could possibly be involved. In using a case study approach, introducing and explaining the characteristics of each participant and the school settings was an important part of telling the story but at the same time this increased the risk of being able to identify participants. In order to overcome this and ensure the participants' anonymity, I made a conscious decision to keep the individual descriptors separate from the work settings.

Informed consent, voluntary participation, right to withdraw and permission

Participants were provided with an information sheet (refer to Appendix B, D) outlining the study and were required to complete an informed consent form (Refer to Appendix C, E) in order to participate. All participants were advised and understood that their participation was voluntary and they could choose not to participate. Furthermore, participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time up until data analysis begun.

Coercion and deception

The purpose, focus and methods were discussed openly and honestly with all participants. Making sure participants felt comfortable with the expectations around their involvement was essential. I wanted my participants to tell their story honestly rather than telling me what they thought I would want to hear. They needed to trust that I would record their experiences as they had told them to me. I could assure them of this by returning the transcripts to them for checking their accuracy.

Member checks were used as a way of ensuring participant perspectives were captured accurately because, as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest, they "reflect a concern with capturing the peoples' own way of interpreting significance as accurately as possible" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 8). Transcripts were emailed to all participants in order to give

them the opportunity to check their interpretation, make any necessary alterations, or add further information.

Researcher safety

Consideration was also given to my own safety as the researcher and all reasonable steps were taken to ensure that I was not placed in a position of physical or emotional distress during the data collection phase.

Ethical Approval

This thesis has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury College of Education Ethical Clearance Committee.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study

A definite strength of this study is that schools and participants were specifically and carefully chosen to suit the purpose of the study. This strategy is consistent with Mutch (2005) who acknowledges that “the sample is chosen for specific reasons to expand our understanding of the phenomena and not to make broad claims” (p. 50).

The strong and consistent presence of the participant voice was another key strength of this study. From the outset, it was crucial to the purpose of this study that the coordinators’ perspectives and experiences remained a fundamental component of the research process. The interviews provided the participants with an opportunity to share in their own words, the perspectives and experiences relating to their work as gifted and talented coordinators.

As a beginning researcher I fully appreciate that there are potential limitations with the methods employed and the decisions made throughout the process. I believe it is important not only to acknowledge and accept limitations of the research but also to make them transparent.

Firstly, the sample size for this study was relatively small, including only six participants and their respective case study schools and cluster group. The participants involved were representative of a small group only, and therefore the voices of other coordinators with responsibility for gifted and talented provisions and programmes were absent. Furthermore, the small sample size together with the case study approach restricts the generalisation of

findings beyond the participants of this study, which means that views of some were not heard.

Secondly, participants were only those who have worked as gifted and talented coordinators and have had involvement with implementing gifted and talented provisions and programmes. The voices of those on the receiving end of such programmes, including students, and their parents and caregivers were not utilised for this study. Moreover, while my participants provided information about the support and leadership of their principal, the principal's voice was absent. I made a conscious decision not to use principals for data gathering and set about gaining an understanding of the difficulties associated with sustaining gifted and talented provisions and programmes from the perspectives of gifted and talented coordinators. One reason for working with coordinators for this thesis was because I too am a gifted and talented coordinator and I wanted to gain a rich description from others working in a similar role. Another reason for using coordinators was because they are closest to the action of what is happening for our gifted and talented students.

Another possible limitation relates to the implications associated with the participants' ontological and epistemological assumptions. As Opie and Sikes (2004) suggest, the major challenge associated with the epistemological stance of knowledge being experiential and subjective thus placing considerable emphasis on the information given by participants, is whether or not participants have been honest. During the interviews however, I observed that the participants were willing to share as much information as they could, doing so in a relaxed manner. I maintain that being a gifted and talented coordinator myself was of benefit, allowing the participants to feel more at ease about sharing their experiences with someone on the same level working in a similar situation.

As a beginning researcher, I learned a significant amount about the overall research process and the many skills and techniques associated with carrying out research. I discovered that there was definitely more to writing and asking effective interview questions than I anticipated. As a result, the initial set of interview questions was reviewed and amended with the intention of getting more out of the semi-structured interviews. Even now however, I wish I knew then what I know now because reflecting on what I have learned I believe I could have structured my interview questions more effectively.

Trustworthiness of the Research

Reliability and validity are two words commonly used within quantitative research. Mutch (2005) refers to reliability as “a test by which quantitative research is shown to be replicable and able to produce consistent results” (p. 225) and validity as “ensuring that a study actually measures what it sets out to measure” (p. 226). As Merriam (1998) states, “all research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (p. 198) and that statement certainly rings true with this study. However, the terms reliability and validity have been replaced with trustworthiness in this instance because this study is not looking for consistency, but rather it is looking for rich individualistic data.

Producing trustworthy research is of importance so that it could be replicated or more importantly, used by others. Being able to trust research is of great importance. This study is trustworthy because the conceptualisation of the study and the way in which the data has been collected, analysed, interpreted and presented was carefully thought through and made transparent.

Being an ethical and responsible researcher was of the utmost importance to me. The level of empathy and value I ascribed to those pivotal to my study was essential and therefore I continually took my participants’ welfare and interest to heart. Walliman and Buckler (2008) agree, and explain that a thesis will not be produced in isolation. “You will be interacting with other people in a more personal way during your study. It is therefore important to avoid unfairly usurping other people’s work and knowledge, invading their privacy or hurting their feelings” (Walliman & Buckler, 2008, p. 30).

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings of information participants shared when interviewed about their experiences as gifted and talented coordinators. The interview questions were organised into six main sections including learning about the participant, establishing and continuing provisions and programmes, professional development and support, leadership, impact and sustainability and finally barriers and constraints. The sections are incorporated below in diagrammatic form to provide an overview before presenting the specific findings.

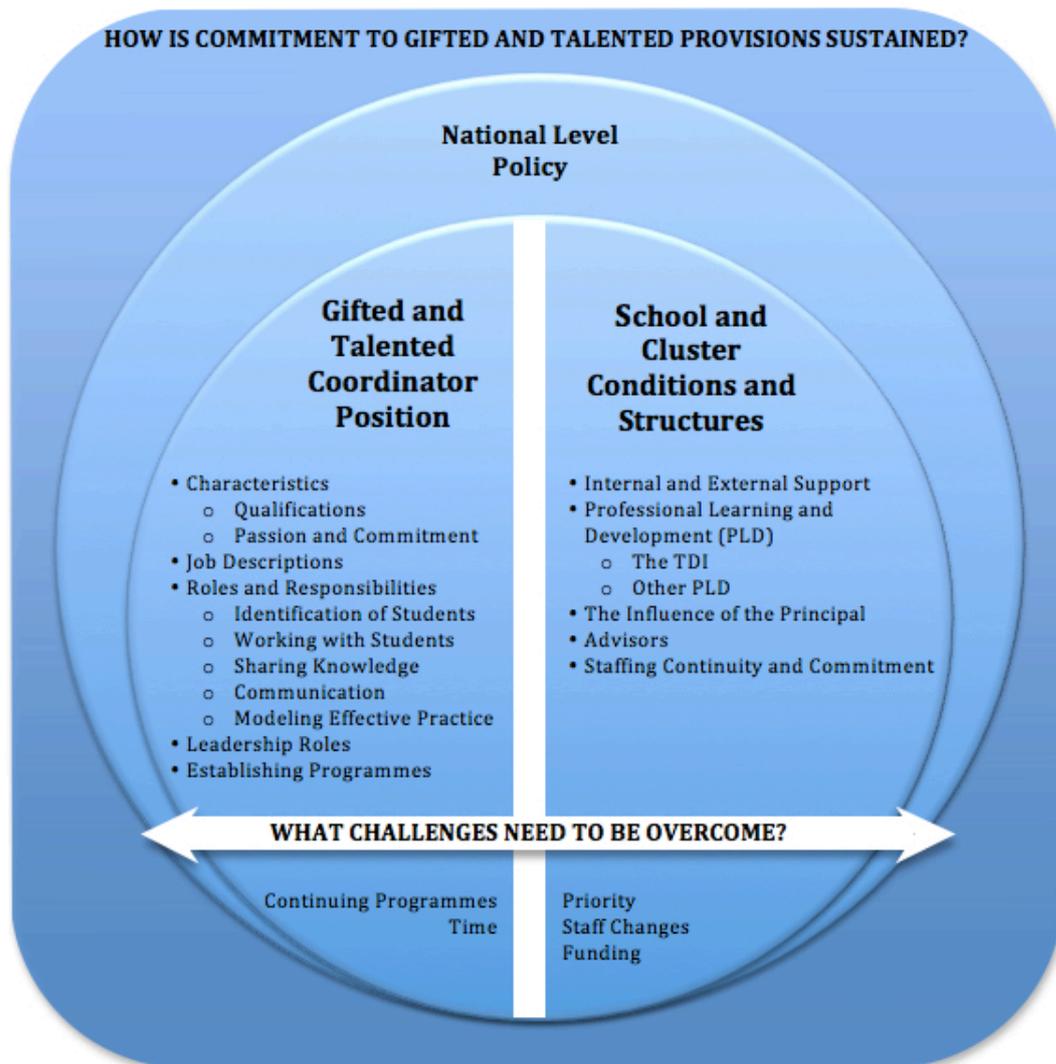


Figure 4.1 Analysis Themes Framework

Figure 4.1 highlights two broad themes as segments, which are separate and at the same time linked as integral features contributing to the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. The arrow running horizontally across the bottom of the diagram represents the challenges associated with gifted and talented provisions and programmes that the participants shared during the interviews. Because challenges were a focus of one of the interview questions, the end of each theme in this chapter will outline any associated dilemmas, frustrations and challenges the findings have highlighted.

The outer circle represents national policy. This encapsulates both broad themes because policy refers to the mandatory requirements and regulations by which schools and clusters must abide and ultimately affects both coordinators and schools. The question of how gifted and talented provisions and programmes are sustained is the focus of this study and therefore the question is positioned at the top of the diagram. Both broad themes plus national level policy and challenges impact on and influence the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes.

I now introduce each theme beginning with the first theme: gifted and talented coordinator position. This includes aspects of the participants' personal characteristics, passion, commitment and roles and responsibilities.

Theme One – The Gifted and Talented Coordinator Position

Learning about the participants and their work provides information about the knowledge and skills participants have to support what it is they do, how they do it and why they do it. Such data provides insights into how the coordinators themselves consider the ways in which ongoing work to meet the needs of gifted and talented students can be maintained. I asked the participants about their teaching career and how they became involved with gifted and talented education. Next the participants were asked questions about why and how provisions and programmes were established. Following on from this I asked participants about their roles and responsibilities and the skills and knowledge necessary for the role. They responded to prompts relating to experience, length of service, positions held, accomplishments, passion and commitment.

Coordinator characteristics

While characteristics of individual gifted and talented coordinators can be many and varied, the characteristics of the gifted and talented coordinators in this study revealed similar profiles. All participants are well practised within the education field, each having more than fifteen years teaching experience. All have been classroom teachers at some stage prior to taking on the role of being a gifted and talented coordinator and three have maintained a teaching position while working as a coordinator. Four participants shared their desire to learn as much as possible and mentioned the benefit of receiving support.

The importance of qualifications

The importance of obtaining a specific gifted and talented qualification was not emphasised by all of the participants. Three participants have completed postgraduate gifted and talented study and continue to place great value on the benefits of postgraduate university study. In contrast, Andrea stated, “some of the best teachers are those who have no training at all. It’s in their heart, it’s part of their soul and I think we can cloud it sometimes with too much theory.” Agreeing with Andrea, Lorraine’s opinion was that a specific gifted and talented qualification is not necessarily a ‘must have’ for those working in a coordinator role. Despite these differing views around the necessity of specific gifted and talented qualifications, all participants believed they had an adequate knowledge and understanding of gifted and talented students, and all concurred that such knowledge and understanding was paramount if provisions and programmes were going to stand any chance of being successfully continued over time. Lorraine stressed the importance of knowledge identifying that “if you don’t have a lot of knowledge, it is difficult to put appropriate programmes into place.” All six participants valued professional learning and development of some sort.

Passion and commitment of coordinators

Passion was an aspect that dominated the interviews, particularly when the participants were asked about their reason for becoming involved in the gifted and talented field. For four of the participants in this study, it was their passion that initiated and drove the establishment of provisions and programmes in their schools. Responses to the interview question about skills and knowledge necessary for a gifted and talented coordinator, revealed a link between passion and commitment. Their passion was a driving force for continued commitment to gifted and talented education. For example, Lorraine maintained that passion, understanding

and knowledge were crucial if the needs of gifted and talented students are to be met and provisions and programmes sustained. Similarly, Sandra and Pam agreed that it was their passion and interest in the area that convinced them to get their head around gifted and talented education and further develop their skills. However, while passion appears to be the inner drive, on its own, passion is not considered to be sufficient to sustain gifted and talented provisions. Lorraine highlighted a variety of factors, which she believed impacted positively on schools involved with the gifted and talented cluster she was coordinating. She maintained:

The schools that did the best out of it, that gained the most out of it were the ones who had a teacher who was passionate about it, who remained there for a long time and understood the programme, who had taken advantage of other professional development opportunities and who had actually worked very hard to do that trickle down through the whole school.

Of the six participants, three had become involved with gifted and talented education because of their own gifted and talented children. This gave them an added impetus to be involved in the gifted and talented field. It marked the beginning of their passion for helping the gifted and talented student. These participants became advocates for gifted and talented education because their personal experiences had led them to realise that something more needed to be done in order to meet the needs of gifted and talented students within their specific setting. This strong commitment ensured the gifted and talented student was always on the radar. Three participants discussed the difference that being a staff member with a passion for the field made when working with other teachers to build a critical mass of colleagues with knowledge and skills to equip them to cater for the needs of gifted and talented students. They corresponded that passion, energy and an understanding of gifted and talented education had a great deal to do with the establishment and subsequent sustainability of provisions and programmes. Therefore, passion and commitment could be identified as key factors associated with the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes.

Coordinator roles and responsibilities

The role of a gifted and talented coordinator was typically the responsibility of one person within each of the four schools, which contrasts to the Kohia Cluster. While this cluster had

one person working in the coordinator role, the intention was to share and distribute some of the responsibility among all of the schools involved. At one point, Raupo School attempted to split the coordinator role, having one person focusing on the administrative tasks while another worked on more practical aspects. However, despite best intentions, the majority of the work still reverted back to being the responsibility of one person. When I asked the participants about their roles and responsibilities, a number of ideas emerged from the data. There were clear similarities between the participants in terms of their roles and responsibilities, yet there are also some notable differences. I agree it is important to realise the role of each gifted and talented coordinator and its associated responsibilities are context specific and dependent upon a number of factors including the priority given to gifted and talented provisions and programmes, funds available, length of time provisions and programmes have been operating, knowledge and skills obtained from professional learning and development and how many hours coordinators have allocated specifically for gifted and talented work.

Roles and responsibilities

Participants talked about a range of roles and responsibilities as coordinators but the identification of gifted and talented students was one that was repeatedly mentioned as a key priority. For example, Lorraine explained that programmes needed to be put in place for children who had been identified and put on a register because “identification is not a means to an end.” Kathryn and Pam also discussed the importance of gradually setting up and maintaining a register as an ongoing responsibility to assist with the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions. However, while Kathryn believed identification and maintaining a register was part of her job, she raised identifying students as a concern noting it was a difficult and challenging task. The reasons she gave for this were relying on staff members for their nominations and the varying opinions staff had on giftedness and talent, checking the identification and making a decision based on the information collected, and ensuring the staff was informed of who had been identified.

Working directly with gifted and talented students came across as another priority for these coordinators. Conversely, in addition to the ‘hands on’ work, roles and responsibilities included maintaining a focus on learning by ‘working with others’ in order to benefit the gifted and talented students. Four participants mentioned focusing on assisting and supporting teachers as a way of getting ‘buy in’ and maintaining the momentum to ensure

the longevity of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Sandra talked specifically about the importance of not only working with gifted and talented students but also working with teachers saying a crucial element of sustaining provisions and programmes was that teachers were given help and that they felt valued. Roles relating to assisting, supporting and working with teachers included raising staff awareness and providing useful resources and information. Lydia talked about the importance of making sure all staff had a clear understanding not only of the scope and purpose of gifted and talented education but also the characteristics of gifted and talented students so they too could be identifiers of potential gifted and talented students.

One way of assisting and supporting colleagues that both Lydia and Sandra mentioned during the interviews was providing teachers with gifted and talented readings of interest and information about professional learning and development opportunities. Lydia highlighted the necessity of providing information to colleagues because more often than not, staff members were unaware of available resources, readings and professional learning and development opportunities and as a result of being so busy, they were less likely to take up valuable time to search it out for themselves. Sandra held a similar view and said, “when you are a busy teacher you need it [PLD] to be offered because you are too busy to seek it out.” According to the participants, teachers needed help to access professional learning and development and this strategy saved the teachers time and ensured they had ready access to essential information.

Working with other teachers, alongside them in their classroom was another role of Sandra’s and a way that she got ‘buy in’ from other staff. She found this to be a useful strategy for developing a critical mass. By going into classrooms, Sandra used modelling to implement change. By actively sharing her knowledge and modelling teaching and learning strategies in classrooms she got others involved and on board with gifted and talented education. There was an expectation that teachers would continue to use modelled strategies with students in their classroom and that these teachers would then disseminate these strategies by sharing them and modelling for teachers from other schools who came to observe while participating in the professional learning and development course run by Harakeke School. In contrast to Lydia and Sandra, Andrea talked about how difficult she found it at times, especially in the beginning, to get ‘buy in’ and a commitment from teachers to get things going. She shared what she considered to be a very useful piece of advice given to her by

her principal, namely that you always need ‘a tipping point’ which she explained as the difference just one person in a syndicate would make. Andrea would search for this one person to keep driving gifted and talented education, which would then get others on board. Andrea insisted that as a result “gradually the gifted and talented culture infiltrated into the school.”

Lorraine talked specifically about “getting a ground swell of advocacy from parents.” She went on to explain “making sure that all the significant groups are behind it and saying this is a programme that is worth keeping and we need to somehow find a solution to making sure it’s ongoing.” Sandra agreed with Lorraine and stressed the importance of achieving success with provisions and programmes in order for others to see it had worked and therefore justify the continuing expense on the resource.

According to the participants, the role of disseminating knowledge was another coordinator responsibility and a key factor that contributed to gifted and talented provisions maintaining an ongoing presence beyond the work of a sole coordinator. Andrea spoke adamantly about the necessity of skills and knowledge being filtered down to others and gave an example explaining how she was involved with establishing a professional learning and development course within her school for their own staff and staff from other schools to register for and participate in. Andrea and Sandra had started this professional learning and development course a number of years ago while they were working together. Andrea viewed running this course as one of her coordinator roles, and since its establishment, it has continued on a yearly basis. Even though Andrea no longer works with Sandra, she believed this course had been fantastic saying “it’s probably one of the only courses where you work in a school and you see the things that go well, the things that don’t go well and how the children work.” This professional learning and development course served a double purpose according to Andrea. It provided a much needed opportunity for professional learning and development for others and at the same time made the teachers at this school more accountable and efficient as they were the ones being observed by the course participants. It was an effective way of disseminating knowledge. Sandra agreed on the importance of disseminating knowledge and up skilling others adding “I always work, sometimes to my disadvantage to make sure it’s spread amongst a school because if I walked out today it would make a huge impact unless other people are skilled.”

Job descriptions and policies

Kathryn was one of only two participants to mention a gifted and talented coordinator job description outlining roles and responsibilities during the interviews, and while doing so revealed that whilst she had a job description in previous years she did not currently have one. It seemed that a job description for this role had been discontinued when the gifted and talented classes or cluster classes were dispensed. Instead, the school in which she worked was able to supply the procedure that guided the work of the gifted and talented coordinator in relation to identification, keeping a register, meeting minutes, correspondence and teaching models. Lorraine was the second participant able to provide written documentation in the form of a schedule pertaining to the programme summary, programme details and assigned personnel. Covered within this schedule were objectives and components of the gifted and talented programme, designation of roles and key tasks, outcomes of the programme and performance indicators to measure progress.

In addition to the discussion relating to job descriptions, Andrea also talked about a gifted and talented ‘policy’ stating that “we wrote a policy for our school in the very beginning and then we did away with it so I’m not sure if a policy is important or not.” She went on to suggest that the person working as the gifted and talented coordinator was probably more important than the very generic policy but then added, “they always say if you lose a person then you have a policy” appreciating the fact that for some schools, a policy would be necessary. Andrea went on to reveal how important she thought her job description was as it provided guidance for carrying out the gifted and talented coordinator role.

When I contacted all participants after the interviews to ask specifically about and request a copy of their job description, three of the six participants explained that they did not currently have a job description but had done so in the past and one participant was able to provide documentation. The reasons for not having a job description varied. Sandra explained that when she took over the role of gifted and talented coordinator from Andrea, she signed a generic contract employing her as a teacher with responsibility for gifted and talented education. Sandra thought one reason for her not having a specific job description may have been because she was working with Andrea part time leading up to taking over the role, she had already acquired a really clear understanding of what the role entailed. Pam said that she had not had a job description since the reduction in the hours she was allocated to fulfil the gifted and talented coordinator role. Lydia thought that she did have a job

description, but assumed it would have been kept in the office with the office manager or the Deputy Principal. Sandra also mentioned that the staff member responsible for keeping such documentation was unable to locate the old job description for her role.

Coordinator leadership

When I asked participants about their roles and responsibilities, they told me about the level of control they were given and opportunities they had to exercise leadership in their role as gifted and talented coordinator. Sandra explained, “I pretty much organise it all, I certainly feel valued professionally and they leave me to get on with my job, but they expect me to do it well.” Similarly to Sandra, Pam was also left to it. In contrast to the other participants, Pam said, “I don’t have a lot of separate control,” and explained that most things she did were run past the principal first. Despite this lack of control, Pam understood and appreciated the involvement from her principal because as she said, “it means that things happen across the school, it means there’s a connection across the whole school, a sort of congruence, if you like, how it happens.” Pam went on to give an example from the school she had worked in previously, identifying that staff had a lot of freedom to develop and do their own things which was problematic because she said “you just didn’t get that congruence of something happening across the school.” Kathryn talked about being unable to manage it saying, “it’s nearly like a full time job on its own, without having a class to teach as well.”

Leadership actions

For Lorraine, leadership actions were very much about disseminating knowledge over time. She considered this to be a ‘trickle down’ incremental approach to leadership as opposed to a direct ‘top-down’ approach. Defining what she terms the ‘trickle down’ approach she said:

It’s very much I’m going to lead this, I’m going to go and find out what it’s about and I’m going to get involved and do something and then I’m going to come back and talk to all of you people at school and we are going to see what suits our school and our community and how it might work for us.

Irrespective of the level of control coordinators were given to exercise leadership, Andrea added, “I think you often work very much on your own as a coordinator in gifted

education.” Andrea went on to give an explanation as to why she believed coordinators often ended up working in isolation saying:

You’ve got all these programmes but you’re not linked into any syndicate and unless you are very proactive, you could just be sitting on the outer all the time. All the other important programmes would run in the school and because you have got strong people in syndicates, they push their barrow perhaps a little bit harder than you can (Andrea).

While the cluster group attempted to share responsibilities more evenly among all schools involved, there was still one coordinator responsible for overseeing the programme, and the participant in that role certainly understood that running a cluster programme could be difficult. It appeared that keeping everyone involved and motivated was at times challenging to say the least.

Establishing and continuing programmes

Most participants discussed the establishment of provisions and programmes for gifted and talented students. The major reason for establishing provisions and programmes that participants shared was because something needed to be done in order to meet the needs of these students but that others also needed to share this concern over time and not just in setting up provisions and programmes. For all of the participants in this study the inception of a gifted and talented programme was due to a combined effort of people and not just the result of a single person.

Four participants were able to discuss the initial set up of their gifted and talented programme in detail as they had direct involvement with establishing it. However, all participants were aware of why and how their specific provisions and programmes had come about. One similarity evident between the different provisions and programmes of each case within the study was that the start size was very small and that it had grown over time. All six participants concurred that programmes were restricted to a very small number of gifted and talented students initially. There was agreement among participants that starting small and building up over time assisted with sustaining the commitment to gifted and talented provisions and programmes within their schools and cluster.

Participants used words such as ‘evolving’, ‘developing’, ‘changing’ and ‘work in progress’ in regard to continuing provisions and programmes once established. According to the participants, the roles and responsibilities of gifted and talented coordinators were determined to some extent by the length of time provisions and programmes had been operating, therefore roles and responsibilities were not static, they too evolved, developed and changed with the provisions and programmes.

Lorraine insisted that all gifted and talented provisions and programmes must be accountable and evaluated and that evaluation contributed to the continuance of established provisions and programmes. Evaluating provisions and programmes was one of Lorraine’s roles as a gifted and talented coordinator. She went on to stress the importance of improving provisions and programmes and explained that evaluation was a useful way of identifying areas for improvement. She also believed that evaluation could contribute to sustainability saying, “programmes always need to be improved but if the bare bones of that programme are good enough, then the stakeholders themselves will be the ones who work very hard to make sure it’s sustainable.”

Challenges associated with the gifted and talented coordinator position

During the interviews participants were asked to share and explain any barriers and constraints they had experienced as gifted and talented coordinators. The interview questions relating to barriers and constraints included what challenges and difficulties had been faced while trying to sustain gifted and talented provisions and programmes and what help or assistance would be beneficial to improve gifted and talented provisions and programmes. One main idea emerged from the information the participants shared in response to this question and that was time.

The challenge of time

While analysing the data it became evident that two different aspects of time were responsible for creating challenges for gifted and talented coordinators. The first was the length of time over a longer period required for establishing and then continuing provisions and programmes and the second was the lack of time available to fulfil coordinator roles and responsibilities.

Repeated mention was given to the process and time it had taken to establish provisions and programmes. Two of the six participants discussed the time it took to establish a gifted and talented programme from its inception. Andrea did not believe that any programme kicked off straight away saying, “it takes a lot of time and it is the culture of the school.” She was adamant that not only time, but also the school culture had an impact on the establishment, success and continuation of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Pam shared a similar idea about time, mentioning research that suggested it can “take three to five years before things embed.”

Carrying out and fulfilling roles and responsibilities was the other challenge due to lack of time and participants continuously echoed this. Kathryn stated that although she was part of a small group who were meant to share the responsibility for gifted and talented provisions and programmes, “the reality is it’s so busy that it’s really hard to find the time to do much and you can’t have everything as a focus.” Sandra agreed that being given more time would be beneficial. She elaborated saying that if she had the option, she would employ someone else to work with gifted and talented students in order to help manage the workload because she knew there were some children not in their gifted programme that perhaps should be. Kathryn was also of the opinion that organising and facilitating programmes was hard because quite a bit of teacher input was needed and the trouble for her was that she was trying to run her own classroom as well as set up individual or small group programmes for gifted and talented students. She found the role of gifted and talented coordinator very demanding and tiring and as a result she noted, “I ran out of steam” and did not achieve a lot.

Kathryn suggested that more release time for teachers who have extra responsibilities would be beneficial and that funding teacher aides for gifted and talented students would assist with overcoming some of the challenges in order to better meet the needs of gifted and talented children. “What I get, I have to ask for and I don’t like being out of my class too much.” She went on to suggest that a regular time slot would be more beneficial for her and the children in her class as opposed to a day here or a day there. The structure of a set amount of time for release on a set day would be a lot easier to work around.

Theme Two – School and Cluster Conditions

The second theme is school and cluster conditions. This theme covers internal and external support, professional learning and development, principal influence, advisers and staffing continuity and commitment.

Internal and external support

Participants discussed the word ‘support’ on numerous occasions throughout the interviews, but particularly when asked about professional learning and development support and elements that have been effective or necessary for sustaining provisions and programmes. The participants highlighted the importance of both getting support and being or feeling supported. The participants were of the opinion that support could come in different forms and from a variety of sources including the Government, principals, colleagues, advisers, parents and caregivers and even the children involved in the gifted and talented programmes.

Professional learning and development – the talent development initiative project

One government funded, national level support has been the TDI. This initiative was accessed by three of the cases in my study of gifted and talented coordinators’ work. Of those three participants, each highlighted the positives associated with their involvement in the TDI. Those participants indicated that being part of a government led contract made access to expert assistance and resources much easier and beneficial. Lydia, Lorraine and Kathryn unanimously agreed that the funding component of the TDI was both helpful and important for enabling the continuation of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Lorraine mentioned, “funding enabled programmes to be extended” while Lydia added “the funding allowed us to have extra expertise in the form of a gifted and talented adviser.”

The participants involved with the TDI agreed on the importance of the funding and two of the three TDI participating coordinators raised concerns about the continuation of their programmes after the completion of the TDI initiative. One participant expressed disappointment about not being selected for the second round of the TDI following their initial three year involvement while another participant was disappointed that their application to participate in the TDI was unsuccessful and therefore the school in which she worked did not get the opportunity to be part of the TDI at all.

The structure of the TDI and its required tasks were explicitly mentioned by one participant who claimed that the reporting aspect, which was a feature of the TDI, assisted with the sustainability of the gifted and talented provisions and programmes.

When we were part of the TDI there was actually a lot of follow up to do so it was very much we were always being reminded. There would be a milestone report, parent meeting or a visitor coming. Now that there's not the same pressure coming from external sources to show that we've met what we said we would do, that has meant the emphasis has gone to curriculum, it's gone to National Standards. Keeping gifted and talented to the fore is difficult when there are always other things coming into the schools long-term plan.

Other professional learning and development

Differences were noted between the participants' individual professional learning and development preferences when I asked them about what professional learning and development opportunities had been offered and their impact. Responses varied with four participants indicating enthusiasm for any opportunities beyond the school and others who were more selective. For example, Lorraine attended as many conferences and seminars as she could because of the opportunities these provided for networking. "I think conferences are great because of the networking abilities and because you actually learn from other people." Andrea also shared her enthusiasm for all professional learning and development opportunities when she stated, "anything that came up, I'd just grab it, I was so excited about it." In contrast to Lorraine and Andrea, Pam explained that she had not been to many conferences or seminars. She had been particularly selective about what she attended and said, "I am past those entry level things that are happening."

Three of the teachers displayed personal responsibility for their learning as teachers with responsibilities for gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Lorraine had become involved with "organising conferences and seminars" and joined the "advisory group to the Ministry of Education." Although the interview question did not specifically pose the reason for extra involvement, Lorraine intimated that involving herself meant she could have more of an influence on what was happening and had a better chance of ensuring needs were met. To me, this was also a signal that rather than being dependent on what was offered she took matters into her own hands and was pro active in the way she went about

attempting to meet the needs of gifted and talented students. Andrea was another participant who joined the organising committee for a conference and she explained, “if you’re driving that and get involved in those things, the teachers come along.” She also continued to challenge and extend herself by presenting a paper at an international conference. She wanted to share her learning with others and referred to this as the “highlight of my career” explaining how much it had done for her confidence. Likewise, Sandra wrote an article for a gifted magazine, and while this benefited her own professional learning and development, it also contributed to developing the skills and knowledge of others. These were three examples of teachers who had initiated their own learning and continued learning in the field of gifted and talented education above and beyond the one off seminars or workshops that schools predominantly offered to staff.

Lorraine suggested networking with others was one benefit of participating in professional learning and development. Schools involved with her cluster had to commit to at least one teacher being involved in a professional learning and development programme for at least three years. She was sure that getting teachers from different schools working together through professional learning and development was a worthwhile strategy for maintaining the focus, priority and sustaining gifted and talented provisions and programmes.

The influence of the principal

Five of the six participants in this study contributed to the establishment of provisions and programmes for gifted and talented students yet they also talked about significant others, namely their principals, who provided valuable support. Participants described those principals’ as being ‘innovative’, ‘entrepreneurial’ and ‘visionary’.

Having a supportive principal had made a big difference to all of the participants. The participants agreed that principal support influenced and contributed to sustainability. Andrea told me “principals make the changes and progress possible.” She went on to give an example of the supportive nature of a past principal by explaining “if you had a passion, even if it wasn’t her passion, she was right behind it, she was so supportive.” In contrast, Andrea had also worked with a principal who, while seemingly in favour of a gifted and talented programme, was so controlling that Andrea felt unable to pursue her own ideas. Andrea referred to the actions of the Principal more particularly the resistance she faced

from staff who only “tolerated her because they had to.” This she described as “soul destroying” and led to her decision to resign.

Kathryn had noted principal turnover as a particular difficulty. These examples suggest that a leader’s vision and priority can impact on sustainability especially when they each have differing or opposing visions and priorities. According to Kathryn, “the sustainability of the programme is very much affected by the leadership actions from the senior management team at the top as to focus and importance and where it comes in the line for funding. So that has a huge impact.” Comparing Kathryn’s experience with a change in principal to that of Sandra’s, some notable differences were obvious. It seemed that the strength of the programme itself had something to do with ensuring sustainability.

Management has helped by keeping it going, through three more principals since the first one. That’s good, but it’s also the strength of the programme and it’s what other schools really need to be working towards so that it doesn’t matter about the personnel so much. It’s a programme in its own right.

Advisers

One form of external support that resonated amongst the participants was that of designated advisers for gifted and talented education. Unfortunately gifted and talented advisory roles suffered cuts and were discontinued at the end of 2009. Lorraine lamented saying “the advisers did a wonderful job because they were doing what the BES for Effective Practice and Professional Development teaches us,” which was to work with the whole school over time. Sandra and Andrea raised the loss of advisers as a real concern, particularly for those in the starting up phase of developing provisions and programmes for gifted and talented students. Andrea went on to acknowledge that “they [advisers] were a resource that didn’t cost you anything, and it was standardised information that you got.” Even Sandra, who worked in a school with a well-established gifted and talented programme, stressed the importance of advisers for schools in a less fortunate situation stating, “for schools where this does not run, it absolutely has to be advisers, but there aren’t advisers anymore.” She went on to demand, “bring back advisers for heaven’s sake.” Andrea pointed out that the Ministry of Education talk about the importance of professional development but yet they cut advisers. “It’s a bit of a dichotomy there - yes professional development is really important but we are cutting advisers.” Putting it very simply, Kathryn said, in reference to

gifted and talented students, “we need more support for them” because the more support, the easier sustainability becomes.

Staffing continuity and commitment

Maintaining knowledgeable, passionate, skilled and experienced gifted and talented teachers and coordinators was a necessity participants discussed, but, so too was ensuring the knowledge and skills were not limited solely to the coordinator. According to Andrea, staff continuity was of great importance.

Andrea mentioned the importance she placed on having one person in a job for a long time but admitted it was something over which you could have little control. Andrea had held her gifted and talented coordinator position for thirteen years from the inception of the gifted and talented programme and believed this had helped the school by contributing to the establishment and sustainability of the programme. Sandra concurred that coordinator continuity was fantastic because it assisted with keeping the role and the programme going. For the Kohia Cluster, continuity was slightly different because one school had taken on the responsibility of acting as the lead school for the Kohia Cluster group for a period of approximately five years. Yet Lorraine, Andrea and Sandra shared a similar belief that the continuity of a lead school kept the focus on gifted and talented education and highlighted the importance and necessity of keeping it going. From the information participants provided, it appears that continuity of staff is a key factor in the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes.

Lydia believed that being able to move forward and make progress with provisions and programmes was dependent on everybody in the school understanding they could be a teacher of gifted and talented. She believed that maintaining the knowledge base within the school was important if provisions and programmes were to be sustained. She went on to suggest a link between maintaining knowledge and teacher commitment explaining that teachers needed a willingness to do the extra work or study required to sustain the knowledge base to keep gifted and talented at the fore and keep the building momentum going.

Challenges associated with school and cluster conditions

Three ideas including priority, staffing changes and funding, emerged from what participants told me about barriers and constraints in relation to the school and cluster conditions theme.

The challenge of priority

The priority and emphasis placed on gifted and talented education within a school or cluster was dependent upon and affected by a number of factors. The participants spoke about policy, leadership, external support, an overcrowded curriculum, lack of time, working in isolation, staff commitment and the amount of research and learning about the field as factors which impacted on the attention or priority given to gifted and talented education. It was evident from this information participants shared that continuing gifted and talented provisions and programmes was seen as a challenge with such a large number of competing agendas resulting in inconsistent emphasis and attention to this important area. Despite the legal obligation to cater for gifted and talented students as set out in the National Administration Guidelines (referred to in the literature review chapter) the findings illustrate different levels of commitment between the case schools and cluster within this study.

The challenge of staffing changes

According to the participants, staffing changes impacted greatly on gifted and talented provisions and created an ongoing and seemingly unavoidable challenge. While Andrea realised the importance of continuity, she admitted that “with such a huge turnover in staff now, more than ever before it’s harder to get that continuity.” Likewise, Lorraine agreed that when a staff member left and someone else took over “you would be starting at square one again.” Andrea went on to explain that often she felt as if she had just got things sorted and then there would be a staffing change. “The change is enormous, you lose a pivotal person and then the gifted provision just doesn’t happen” (Andrea). Lydia, a participant involved with the TDI, echoed the sentiments of Andrea revealing:

The people who were there from the beginning have gone, so the actual keeping of the knowledge has been difficult because we don’t have a group of people who had the benefit of the training.

Considering the impact staff turnover had on gifted and talented students, Lydia also stated:

Turnover of staff is our greatest issue because we have placed children into classes with a teacher that we haven't actually got much knowledge of their ability to teach a gifted and talented class.

The challenge of funding

Funding surfaced as a contentious issue and participants identified funding as the major challenge for sustaining gifted and talented provisions and programmes. All participants discussed the idea of resourcing and more specifically budgets and funding when asked about any challenges and difficulties they had faced trying to sustain gifted and talented provisions and programmes and what help or assistance they thought would be beneficial to improve gifted and talented provisions and programmes. The information participants' provided highlights some issues surrounding allocation of funds for gifted and talented provisions and programmes.

There were differing viewpoints between the participants relating to funding. While all participants explained the necessity of funding, two participants refused to let the lack of funding get in the way of running a successful gifted and talented programme. Andrea shared some advice given to her by a Principal which she believed was useful motivation for establishing and continuing a programme.

Don't ever use funding as an excuse for not being able to achieve something, do it somehow because funding will always be an issue in every single situation.

While programmes can be successful without funding, all participants indicated some type of funding was required for sustaining programmes over a longer period of time. Lydia stressed the importance and necessity of having funding to be able to cater for gifted and talented students. Likewise, Lorraine maintained, "everybody knows that with funding it's so much easier to do it." However, she also realised that "gifted and talented is seen as down on the lower level" and that "it's not going to get any better because there isn't going to be any money for us." Lorraine used the term "creative funding" to describe the way in which funding was allocated to gifted and talented provisions and programmes, yet she was unsure and unable to explain exactly how the funding worked.

In comparison, Sandra talked about her school determining a set amount on an annual basis that she was able to use for gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Like Lorraine, Sandra did not know the details about where the money had come from or how the allocation of funds worked. She raised this as a concern saying “if it’s not tagged, that’s how programmes can fall over.” Andrea, who worked with Sandra, also mentioned having a set budget but she went on to explain that if there was worthwhile professional learning and development that had not been budgeted for, there were always ways around it. She was of the opinion that it was the supportiveness of the leaders within the school that had the greatest impact in relation to allocation of funds and finding funds if and when it was necessary, therefore arguing gifted and talented coordinators needed to be skilled negotiators in order to win the support of school leaders.

Kathryn was another participant who talked about having the allocation of a budget for gifted and talented provisions and programmes and agreed with Andrea on the impact the Principal can have stating:

The sustainability of the programmes is very much affected by the leadership at the top as to focus and importance and where it comes in the line for funding.

In contrast to Andrea’s experience of a supportive Principal, Kathryn discussed a less supportive principal. The appointment of a new principal saw the termination of the Board of Trustees funded gifted and talented budget because “it was decided that there was better use for the money than the gifted and talented programme.” Kathryn went on to explain that following the cut to the Board of Trustees funded budget she had since been allocated some funds two years in a row. She considered this was a positive stating, “because I had the funds I could actually open the doors to more things without the kids having to pay for everything.”

Kathryn was of the opinion that school leaders make decisions based on the reality of what it was they had to work with and indicated that the Government needed to look at how they funded schools. She went on to reiterate that it would be beneficial if the Government recognised and acted on the fact that we do need some more financial support, indicating that the way in which funds are allocated needs to be reconsidered and modified if

provisions and programmes are going to be improved and sustainable over a longer period of time.

The participants certainly highlighted some strategies and key factors which they believed contributed to the sustainability of provisions and programmes, and just as willingly identified challenges and obstacles which needed to be overcome in order to keep the momentum for gifted and talented education moving in the right direction. In the next chapter, I synthesise and discuss these data themes drawing upon the literature.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Chapter Overview

This chapter synthesises the findings of my study using three main themes, namely leadership beyond a single gifted and talented coordinator role, professional learning and ongoing support for the coordinator role, and school level conditions and their impact on gifted and talented education. I signal points of agreement and difference, in order to gain insights into the vexed issue of what is needed to ensure the ‘torch stays alight’, to sustain attention on the supports for gifted and talented students.

Leadership Beyond a Single Gifted and Talented Coordinator

The literature tells us that the emphasis given to gifted and talented education has lacked consistency (Knudson, 2006; Moltzen, 2011b). My participants shared this same concern, holding this inconsistency partly responsible for impeding the development and continuation of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Lorraine pinpointed the years between 2005 and 2009 as the last time there had been a noticeable emphasis by the Ministry of Education to gifted and talented education. Now that it was 2013 was concerning them because of this lapse of attention. The participants had attributed this to competing agendas of curriculum and national standards at both school and national levels. I noted that MacBeath (2009a) had also suggested “the everyday discourse within a school and its focus of concern is subject to policy pressures, to the demands of organisational convenience and by the competitive demands of curricular subjects” (p. 81). Regardless of this reality, Lydia argued “it is something you have to keep working at to keep it to the forefront.” Her comment confirms the continuing need to find ways to keep the gifted and talented ‘torch burning brightly’. Thus in the absence of a sustained national level focus, the task of not only ‘holding the torch’ but ‘protecting its flame’ was the prerogative of individual schools and particularly the passion and commitment of coordinators responsible for the gifted and talented education portfolio, which all six of my participants displayed.

My study focused specifically on the role and importance of the gifted and talented coordinator. My findings indicate the value of having a knowledgeable ‘go to’ person who is regularly available to assist, support and work with staff, students, parents and caregivers. This is consistent with Davies (2011) who refers to a definition of leadership which

involves inspiring and supporting others towards the achievement of a vision to which all contribute and commit. However, I also argue that by itself, the gifted and talented coordinator role is insufficient to ensure the needs of gifted and talented students are adequately addressed in schools. This is why my study has explored the role, contexts and supports surrounding their work including the interest of the school principals.

The belief that a designated leadership role is required to enhance learning is prevalent within literature (Education Review Office, 2008). Robinson et al. (2009) write that use of a broader term 'leadership' draws attention to actions of many rather than a single person referred to as a leader. Likewise, Swaffield and MacBeath (2009) and Southworth (2005) remind us that leadership work is for everyone.

A move beyond what is possible from a single leader to the notion of a need for all teachers to engage in leadership work is captured within the literature by the term 'shared' and sometimes 'distributed' leadership. While shared and distributed leadership are recognised and accepted as an effective form of leadership within the literature (Day et al., 2011; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Robinson et al., 2009; Southworth, 2009), one discrepancy between this and my findings was, more often than not, most of the gifted and talented responsibility was left to one person, particularly within the schools.

The terms 'shared leadership' and 'distributed leadership' are often used synonymously, yet Waterhouse and Moller (2009) explain that distributed leadership is often interpreted as a form of delegated leadership as opposed to the leadership being shared. In my study, the principals had handed over leadership for gifted and talented education by creating a coordinator position and had typically then left the coordinators to it. It appears that for most of the participants in this study, it was delegated leadership at play, rather than an approach that would necessarily invite a broader base of teachers as leaders. As a result, Kathryn found the role "pretty demanding" and "very wearying."

According to Waterhouse and Moller (2009), distributed leadership has received escalating interest due to "the growing recognition of the limitations of relying on the single heroic leader" (p.123). This is consistent with Southworth (2009) who recognises that "belief in the power of one is giving way to belief in the power of everyone" (p. 94) and also with Bishop et al (2010) who make it clear that "proactive, responsive and distributed leadership

is essential for the sustainability of a reform in a school” (p. 35). The participants echoed this, alluding to a number of challenges associated with being a gifted and talented coordinator, bringing to light the potential detrimental effects associated with the entire responsibility being handed down to a coordinator. Leaving the responsibility of gifted and talented education to mainly one person appears to have added a measure of vulnerability to longer-term sustainability of provisions and programmes. Kathryn described her energy level as at “burn out” and “totally stuffed” with no more to give. I suggest provisions and programmes will become more susceptible to decline and deterioration if that person is unable to sustain their commitment. Similarly, Riley et al. (2004a) found that teachers in their study believed the programme to be “reliant on the enthusiasm, drive, and expertise of the programme coordinator” (p. 260). Therefore, sharing the leadership may in fact reduce stress levels, promote knowledge sharing and support sustainability. Echoed within the literature is that a shared endeavour calls for shared leadership (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009).

All of the participants were well aware of the importance and necessity of a principal who was not only supportive and supported the learning of others, but even more so, was a learner themselves. There was agreement among the participants that the principal played an imperative role in promoting learning through the support given to learning. Pam summed up principal support in relation to gifted and talented education nicely with her statement, “if a principal isn’t really that well informed, but knows they’ve got to do it, wants it to happen, but really doesn’t give that commitment to it, it won’t happen. The staff see that and will read that message and will go away and do their own thing.” This again links with Southworth’s (2009) ‘modelling’ strategy in which visibility is pertinent. For both coordinators and principals working in leadership roles, understanding their level of visibility is imperative. Realising that staff constantly observe with interest in order to ascertain to what extent leaders ‘walk the talk’ should dictate to a certain extent, appropriate and effective leadership actions.

Professional Learning and Ongoing Support for the Coordinator Role

The importance of professional learning and development is well documented within the literature (Alton-Lee, 2003; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; McLaughlin, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2000; Timperley et al., 2007), and not surprisingly, this was reflected in my

study. All six participants understood the value of professional learning and development, describing it as having “a lot of impact” (Sandra).

At the time of involvement, the participants considered the TDI to be very beneficial professional learning and development. The TDI was a driving force, motivation was at an all time high, support was readily available, progress was visible and the spotlight remained firmly fixed on gifted and talented students and gifted and talented education. The participants appreciated that the TDI was ongoing for a period of three years. However, they raised some concerns about the immediate and longer lasting impact the conclusion of the initiative had, realising the emphasis dropped away when the funding, support and accountability were removed. This is consistent with Coburn (2003) who reiterates that schools may well find it difficult to sustain external initiatives in the face of competing priorities and changing demands. She goes on to criticise the “short-term influx of resources, professional development, and other forms of assistance to facilitate implementation” (p. 6) because they all dissipate over time when external support is withdrawn. Moreover, Timperley et al. (2007) warn that continually shifting priorities to the ‘next big thing’ can undermine the sustainability of changes already underway. They advise that “innovation needs to be carefully balanced with consolidation if professional learning experiences are to impact positively on student outcomes” (p. 225).

The participants identified the conclusion of professional learning and development as a problem. Sandra commented that when “professional development dries up they are just swimming on their own, and you just can’t do it.” This comment indicates the necessity of some form of continued support being available to contribute to sustaining provisions and programmes in the longer term. This is echoed by Timperley et al. (2007) who would expect “any definition of sustainability to include reference to ongoing professional learning that will lead to continuing improvement” (p. 218).

The literature stresses that professional learning and development opportunities should be continuous and collaborative. Andrea agreed and was of the opinion that “gifted professional development has to be provided frequently and consistently,” a sentiment that was echoed by all of the participants. However, in saying that, the participants raised concerns over the feasibility of continuous and ongoing professional learning and development because of a lack of funding, competing priorities and an overcrowded

curriculum. The participants' concerns about continuous professional development are well justified according to Fullan (2007), who suggests that the lack of opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and sustained learning is a problem with professional development.

During the interviews, the participants were asked about their own personal professional learning and development experiences. While they clearly valued opportunities for learning in this field, there were notable differences in responses, with all participants holding differing views around what they considered effective and worthwhile professional learning and development. Most of the participants immersed themselves in any and all professional learning and development opportunities they were given, while one participant was a lot more discerning in the choices she made around professional learning and development. This is consistent with research suggesting that teachers pass through different developmental phases during their teaching career and therefore require learning in different ways at different times (Day & Sachs, 2004). These contrasting teachers' views also indicate that most of the teachers in my study were accepting of the available supports rather than initiating requests for support. While there is a body of literature highlighting adult learning and developmental phases (Day & Gu, 2010), the participants in this study revealed they had considerably different needs and wants regarding their personal growth and development as teachers of gifted and talented students. Similarly, Timperley et al. (2007) recognise that "within any group of teachers, there are diverse professional learning needs" (p. 6) and that "what needs to be learned depends on both the prior learning, skills, and dispositions of individuals and groups, and the demands of their current teaching context, because different practice contexts require different skills" (p. 6). Author sources in the literature confirm the complex nature of adults and their learning, revealing that it is the needs of the students in a particular context which should be the focus, rather than saying that teachers of a particular age or experience level require particular professional learning.

As well as understanding their own professional learning and development needs as a leader, the coordinators realised the value of promoting professional learning and development for other staff as part of their leadership role. This is consistent with Timperley et al. (2007) who suggest "much of the responsibility for promoting the professional development of teachers rests with school leaders" (p. 192). Likewise, Cordingley (2013) agrees that there is "much that school leaders can and should be doing to

promote professional learning” (p. 28). Most of the participants in this study used a more informal approach to providing professional learning and development in their coordinator role, which supports the literature on teachers as leaders. Nevertheless, there was agreement among the participants that the coordinator role necessitated providing other staff members with professional learning and development opportunities.

The participants discussed advisory support, being certain that it was advisers who could assist in reducing some of the difficulties associated with providing quality and effective professional learning and development opportunities. While there was understanding and agreement that it would be imprudent of a gifted and talented coordinator to rely solely on one form of external support, the participants stressed the importance and necessity of the availability of various forms of gifted and talented support to improve the sustainability of provisions and programmes.

The participants held the external support the advisers provided in high esteem, valuing their positive contribution to gifted and talented provisions and programmes prior to the Government discontinuing their role. This sentiment was echoed by Riley et al. (2004a) who state “the advisers in gifted and talented education through School Support Services provide[d] a unique model of professional development” (p. 155).

The participants intimated advisory support to be one of the most beneficial forms of professional learning and development because of the way in which advisers immersed themselves in the specific context and worked with the staff over time. Again, this resonates with Timperley et al. (2007) who suggest external experts are more effective when they work with teachers in “more iterative ways, involving them in discussion and the development of meaning for their classroom contexts” (p. xxix).

School Level Conditions and their Impact on Gifted and Talented Education

Some of the participants alluded to the necessity of placing more emphasis on the components or conditions that support the development and sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. I will refer to physical spaces, funding, staffing continuity, working and learning together, time for talking and evaluation.

Physical spaces

Sandra and Andrea were the only participants to mention the importance of a physical space dedicated to gifted and talented students and their learning. Interestingly, Sandra believed that the purpose built building played a part in sustaining provisions and programmes. In a sense, the sustainability of provisions contributed to the building being built and the building being built contributed to and enhanced sustainability. The purpose built building illustrated the commitment made to gifted and talented education by the Board of Trustees and the school, and it says a lot about the normality, importance, acceptance and value placed on gifted and talented provisions and programmes. She spoke proudly of the dedicated gifted and talented learning space and its positive impact on student attitude, appreciating that “the kids come here happily.” This is consistent with Dempster and Bagakis (2009), who believe that physical spaces should always stimulate learning. They also reinforce that physical spaces should be dedicated to a celebration of learning and achievement. Not surprisingly, this was reflected by Sandra who acknowledged the building is “full of stuff,” referring not only to the teacher and student resources, but more so to the learning and achievements adorning the walls. She spoke about the importance of celebrating learning in informal and formal ways including the use of wall space and “putting things in the newsletters” to showcase achievements.

Just as Dempster and Bagakis (2009) believe that sharing the real joy of achievement adds to the satisfaction of students, teachers and parents, so too does Sandra. However, it appeared that Sandra took celebrating student and programme achievement one step further than filling the wall space, having an ulterior motive for doing so in order to assist with sustainability. There is an intentional subtlety about the way in which she infiltrated the successes of gifted and talented individuals and the programme as a whole throughout the entire school community because she typically used the opportunity to provide evidence and subconsciously convinced and reinforced to others, the necessity of continuing gifted and talented provisions and programmes. She continually modelled this commitment through her talk and actions (Southworth, 2009).

Funding

My participants felt strongly about infrastructural support such as a budget and funding for gifted and talented education, and deemed it essential to the sustainability of provisions and programmes in the longer term. According to most of my participants, financial support

was required for a number of reasons including the allocation of release time to allow coordinators to fulfil roles and responsibilities, professional learning and development and support for gifted and talented students. Correspondingly, the infrastructural support documented within Timperley et al. (2007) studies were similar.

The participants were aware that they had little to no effect on the amount of internal or external financial support allocated to gifted and talented provisions and programmes. In saying that however, they went on to stress that leaders, namely principals, had a significant influence on the sustainability of provisions and programmes and the impact of this influence was dependent on the “the focus and importance and where it comes in the line for funding.” (Kathryn). This is consistent with Timperley et al. (2007) who found that school leaders play a crucial role in providing infrastructural support. Dempster and Bagakis (2009) also support this, arguing that leaders are responsible for school resources such as funding and “it is they who are able to facilitate bringing these to bear on improving the conditions for learning” (p. 103). Therefore, it is important for principals to understand the significance of their role in providing infrastructural support, and more importantly the way in which it is used to improve conditions for learning and outcomes for our gifted and talented students. Yet, at the same time, participants were adamant that coordinators must be skilful negotiators and advocates of gifted and talented provisions and programmes, with the ability to send strong and clear messages about the necessity of funding. Andrea likened this to “pushing your barrow harder than others can.” The capability to gain the support of the principal and Board of Trustees is crucial, because as Riley et al. (2004a) suggests, “this support is often linked to the allocation of school funding for gifted and talented programmes” (p. 266).

Staffing continuity

Continuity of staff was another condition that the participants felt was particularly influential for the sustainability of an environment for learning. There was consensus among the participants that high staff turnover was detrimental to the development and sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes yet they realised that staff turnover was an unavoidable reality. Riley et al. (2004a) highlight that the loss of teachers can cause disruptions to a gifted programme. Likewise, Timperley et al. (2007) concur that “teacher turnover is inevitably a threat to sustainability” (p. 223) and suggest a comprehensive staff induction programme as a solution to manage this threat. Similarly,

some of the participants also indicated that an induction programme was a strategy they used to lessen the impact of teacher turnover on the development and sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Lydia suggested that sustainability had a lot to do with maintaining knowledge within the school. All of the participants shared the same desire to have all staff involved. Pam highlighted the importance of everyone being involved stating, “what happens is if you’ve got just one teacher who’s driving it in the school and they leave, it can fall over.” Similarly to Riley et al. (2004a), Swaffield and Dempster (2009) recognise “the strength, resilience and capability of a school lie in its distributed intelligence, its shared leadership and its communal learning” (p.45). This suggests that if the Leadership for Learning Principles (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009) were embedded within practice, the emphasis on leadership and learning being everybody’s business could work as a strategy for not only coping with the loss of a staff member, but also continuing on as normal, because “schools function best when all their members work together” (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009, p. 45).

Working and learning together

The dissemination of skills and knowledge associated with gifted and talented education was important to the participants. This notion of all teachers as teachers of the gifted is reinforced by the Ministry of Education (2000). From information participants shared with me, it could be inferred that broadening the professional learning net to all staff within a school was a better way of ensuring the development of a critical mass of teachers committed to serving the needs of gifted and talented students.

Time for talking

Acknowledging that time for talking about how to address students’ learning needs matters amongst teachers, my participants spoke about ways in which they appreciated opportunities to talk and share with others. Echoed within the leadership for learning literature is the importance of dialogue internally between staff and externally between schools. Lorraine found learning from teachers about what was happening in other schools very useful and specifically mentioned attending conferences as beneficial due to the networking opportunities. Southworth (2009) agrees that opportunities to talk with other professionals can enhance your repertoire. ‘Networking’ was understood to be “one of the things that worked very well” (Lorraine). This is consistent with Swaffield and Dempster (2009) who believe dialogue “provides the connection between people, enabling them to

develop the shared meanings” (p. 106). Similarly, Southworth (2009) believes that dialogue provides an opportunity to articulate thinking, understanding and assumptions and that it generates construction and co-construction of professional knowledge. Furthermore, Swaffield and Dempster (2009) recognise the importance of dialogue involving people from different sections and levels within schools. It is this dialogue between colleagues working in different sections and levels which “helps to put the concepts of broadly and deeply distributed leadership into action (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009, p. 106). Once again, this highlights the necessity of contributions from everybody involved so that leadership and learning are exercised across the school.

While the importance of communication and networking was evident, the participants did not discuss how deliberate the time for talk was or how it was planned, structured and scaffolded. The literature highlights that the time given to talking about gifted and talented students must be intentional and not only acknowledged, but accepted as an important aspect of discussion when planning for and meeting the needs of diverse students. According to Swaffield and Dempster (2009), the way in which dialogue is initiated, supported, fuelled and sustained is important because “we know that dialogue about learning and leadership does not necessarily occur without a conscious stimulus” (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009, p. 109). Once again, this is consistent with Southworth (2009), who also places great emphasis on the need to create opportunities for staff to talk specifically about teaching and learning. It seems the participants in this study participated in professional conversations and encouraged others to do the same as part of their gifted and talented coordinator role, yet the same observation cannot be made about the use of ‘disciplined dialogue’. ‘Disciplined dialogue’ is positively focused on the moral purpose of the school, is all-embracing and allows equal opportunities for everyone to engage, stimulated by rich data, deliberate, planned and necessitates cross-boundary interchange (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009). Furthermore, using three disciplined dialogue questions is considered by Swaffield and Dempster (2009) as a useful and effective strategy for scaffolding, structuring and supporting dialogue. The questions include, what is the data telling us? What, if anything, do we need to do about it? And, how might we act? Swaffield and Dempster (2009) suggest that “reaching a point where ‘disciplined dialogue’ infuses professional conversations in schools is not necessarily easy” (p. 107). I suspect that had these teachers been introduced to processes like those of ‘disciplined dialogue’,

they would have found their role to sustain gifted and talented programmes easier because teachers would recognise their interest in data to inform decisions for next steps.

Evaluation

The participants considered internal and external evaluation requirements and accountability responsibilities important. Likewise, MacBeath (2009b) recognises that it is important to maintain a focus on evidence, align policy and practice to suit the specific setting and ensure a continuing focus on sustainability (MacBeath, 2009b). He also suggests that a shared and collegial approach towards evaluation and accountability. Once again highlighting that sharing the accountability burden beyond the gifted and talented coordinator by making it everybody's business, will have a greater impact on the outcomes of gifted and talented students.

The 'self managing' school system we have in Aotearoa New Zealand, means that substantial financial and administrative responsibility rests with the school. Therefore, evaluation must be a mandatory component of gifted and talented. Four participants spoke generally about the necessity and purpose of evaluating gifted and talented programmes. What was less clear was how effective their evaluation methods were for determining the effectiveness of provisions and programmes and subsequently improving them. Concurring, Riley et al. (2004a) agree on the necessity of evaluating gifted and talented programmes saying:

The overall purpose in programme evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of provisions in meeting the needs of gifted and talented students and for the purpose of improvement or enhancement of those provisions (p. 141).

From the participants' insights, it appears that programmes were more likely to continue over time if they were successful. However, the way in which the principal and Board of Trustees perceived the effectiveness of provisions and programmes was likely to determine whether provisions and programmes remained in place and how much emphasis was given to them. This further accentuates the necessity of not only evaluating programmes but moreover, using the evaluative data to inform practice and improve programmes, and to inform the Board of Trustees in order to receive the support, funding and emphasis required if provisions are to be sustained.

Connecting Leadership and Learning

In educational settings such as schools, it is essential that leadership actions focus on students' learning and achievement. This is the moral purpose of schooling. The importance of this work is recognised more explicitly because the connection between leadership and learning is now a field of study within school leadership literature (Bishop et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2011; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Robinson et al., 2009; Southworth, 2009). This connection has emerged from concerns about how leaders convey interest and focus on students and their learning despite their workloads and other pressures. Likewise, Robinson et al. (2009) have realised this same need for a strong connection between leadership and learning thus showing the need for constant attention to the improvement of student's learning experiences to ensure the quality of their learning.

Robinson et al. (2009) recognise the strong focus pedagogical leadership has on leader involvement in teaching and learning no matter the distance from the classroom. Bishop et al. (2010) also focus on pedagogical leadership, while Southworth (2009) specifically refers to leadership that enhances student learning using the term 'learner-centred leadership'. Hallinger (2011) and MacBeath and Dempster (2009) prefer to use the term leadership for learning. However, despite some variation in terminology, there is consensus among authors that leadership must be explicit and framed in such a way that learning is the core business of leaders, teachers and students. Indeed, Swaffield and MacBeath (2009) even say "leadership and learning are indispensable to each other" (p. 48).

This literature on leadership for learning has a strong link to my thesis and my research questions, showing specifically how and the extent to which the work of school leaders, namely gifted and talented coordinators and their principals, can keep the needs of gifted and talented students to the fore in both classrooms and schools. When giving consideration to the five leadership for learning principles (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009) presented in Chapter Two, and overlaying them with my findings and this discussion, connections between leadership and learning begin to emerge.

In this chapter I have argued that the sustainability of gifted and talented education is dependent on schools having a clear focus on professional learning (principle 1) about the gifted and talented student. Furthermore, the school's culture and environment (principle 2)

must match that intent including deliberate ways of talking (principle 3) about practice with one another, sharing the leadership (principle 4) and having an evidence trail (principle 5). The five leadership for learning principles, when applied to gifted and talented education, may well be the ‘accelerants’ required to enable the ‘torch to burn faster and brighter’ for gifted and talented students.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Chapter Overview

This concluding chapter highlights what has been learned from talking with the gifted and talented coordinators about how and why momentum and focus on provisions and programmes must be sustained for gifted and talented students. There are three main sections of this chapter. The first is devoted to the research questions, the next recommendations, and finally further research.

Answering the Research Questions

I now address each research question in turn to show the extent to which my data relates to and answers the research questions.

Main research question

My main overarching research question asked, how do New Zealand primary schools overcome the problem of sustaining quality gifted and talented education provisions and programmes?

My participants confirmed that sustaining a commitment to gifted and talented provisions and programmes was no easy feat. While my participants were strongly committed to gifted and talented students and gifted and talented education, they also acknowledged that still more work is needed for them to be confident that provisions and programmes have a more permanent and lasting presence in their schools. As Lorraine suggested, “I don’t think we have got it right yet, I think there is a long way to go, there are better ways of doing it.” This study has ascertained that the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes is hugely reliant on a complex interplay of a variety of factors and conditions, each of which is unique to specific school contexts. Despite the hit and miss support associated with gifted and talented education, these coordinators have never lost their passion, ensuring that their gifted and talented ‘torch’ has continued to burn. The participants identified a number of challenges, all of which they said influenced their ability to sustain a commitment to gifted and talented provisions in their respective settings. Additionally, the participants identified strategies as ways to manage and overcome

challenges and enhance the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. It is their suggestions, their ideas to ‘fuel their torch fire’, which I draw on to answer to the question of how to sustain programmes for gifted and talented students.

Supplementary research question one

The aim of my first supplementary question was to capture the reality of the gifted and talented coordinator role in order to understand why sustaining programmes is so difficult. I asked what challenges and obstacles needed to be overcome by gifted and talented coordinators in order to keep the momentum for gifted and talented education provisions and programmes?

Eight main challenges surfaced from the interviews with my participants. These included moving beyond the identification of gifted and talented students, lack of allocated time and funding, staff turnover, lack of school level current gifted and talented policy documentation, provisions and programmes becoming embedded within the school culture, the isolation of gifted and talented education, the single positional role of a gifted and talented coordinator and the inconsistent emphasis given to gifted and talented education.

The first challenge relates to moving beyond identifying gifted and talented students. The identification of gifted and talented students has received a lot of attention in Ministry of Education documentation and other gifted and talented literature (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; McAlpine & Moltzen, 1996; Ministry of Education, 2000, 2008; Moltzen, 2011b; Plucker & Callahan, 2008; Riley et al., 2004a, 2004b; Tunncliffe, 2010). From comments made during the interviews, my participants told me they had put a great deal of time and effort into setting up and maintaining a register as part of the identification process. My participants were able to share in detail, the identification strategies and processes that they had used to identify gifted and talented students. This is consistent with Easter (2011) who refers to identification as a crucial aspect of gifted and talented education. However, she also suggests that “sometimes there can be an overemphasis on identification at the expense of getting on with developing good quality educational programmes” (Easter, 2011, p. 209). This sentiment was echoed in the responses from the participants in my study. Therefore, I argue that progress needs to be made to move on from identification if the work is to have benefits to those identified as having particular gifts and talents.

A second challenge that all of my participants had concerns about was the lack of time and funding allocated for gifted and talented provisions and programmes. From Lorraine's point of view, "gifted and talented is seen as down on the lower level and so funding is cut." The participants recognised that more time and more funding were required for provisions and programmes to be improved and continued over a longer period of time. Even with the coordinators' strong intentions and determination to not let gifted and talented provisions be hampered by either, Lorraine confirmed that, "everybody knows that with funding it's so much easier."

A third challenge recognised by my participants was staff turnover, confirming author sources in the gifted and talented literature (Education Review Office, 2008; Kirwan, 2013; Riley et al., 2004a; Timperley et al., 2007). Notwithstanding the coordinator's best efforts, this was one challenge over which they had considered they had little to no control. Seemingly, with no way around staff turnover, the coordinators commented about their ongoing work to bring new staff members up to speed with gifted and talented provisions and programmes, saying that with each new staff member "you would be starting at square one again" (Lorraine). They found this rather frustrating.

A fourth challenge exposed by my participants was the lack of current gifted and talented policy or procedural documentation in their schools. This was despite the supporting guidelines in the Ministry of Education documents recommending this practice. While the participants were able to explain in detail what they typically did for gifted and talented students, most had difficulty showing me any formal procedural documents to support their actions. This showed me that provisions were more likely to be ad hoc and haphazard rather than planned and intentional and linked to written documentation. This finding was also noted by Riley et al. (2004a) who discovered "potential gaps between paper and practice" (p. 272). Alarming, a job description was another form of documentation that was difficult to come by. Out of the six participants, only one was able to supply a job description, and that job description was out of date.

A fifth challenge was how to embed gifted and talented provisions into the schools culture so that all staff shared the gifted and talented focus. Andrea was one of my participants who claimed despite her best efforts her school become complacent about gifted and talented education. While she identified that her school had been perceived to be leaders in

the gifted and talented field, she went on to warn that a potential consequence associated with doing something well is that you are at risk of not continuing it. Similarly, the other participants acknowledged the assumption that provisions and programmes would automatically continue over time without any extra support, but they realised this was not always the case. My data showed that each of the settings, via gifted and talented coordinators, could report measures of success with the provisions of gifted and talented programmes in the short term. Their real issues of concern related to how programme momentum could be sustained in the longer term. This needed a more deliberate strategy underpinned by targeted support rather than being left to chance and individual teacher passions.

A sixth challenge my participants associated with the role of a gifted and talented coordinator was that gifted and talented provisions and programmes tended to be kept separate from curriculum learning areas. This was considered a stumbling block for the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions. As Pam commented, “the fact that it’s not a curriculum area can be a barrier to gifted and talented education because it’s hard for leadership to see sometimes where it hooks into.” It is important to raise the question as to whether gifted and talented education should sit within each curriculum learning area and how this would be managed. I would therefore argue that in the ideal world, schools and teachers should be able to signal how they are managing provisions and programmes across every learning area and supporting curriculum specialists.

A seventh challenge the participants spoke fervently about relates to the issue of a single positional role of a gifted and talented coordinator. My participants were concerned about burn out, unrealistic expectations, workload and lack of time to coordinate provisions and programmes across their schools.

An eighth challenge recognises the great concern and discontent participants expressed towards the inconsistent emphasis given to gifted and talented education and their constant battle to keep gifted and talented education to the fore with so many competing agendas. As Pam explained, “I think there has been in the past, really great government support and that has just melted away... I think that’s a real shame because it gives a big message to schools.” Other comments made during the interviews indicated that this inconsistent emphasis was a difficult overarching challenge associated with working as a gifted and

talented coordinator and sustaining provisions and programmes. From the point of view of Lorraine, the best and only option, even though it was deemed far from ideal, was to “work with what you have got, with what’s happening.”

Supplementary research question two

The intention of the second supplementary research question was to look ahead towards improving what is currently being done. The question asked, what strategies or key factors can be identified to address the challenges faced by gifted and talented coordinators in order to sustain and manage gifted and talented education programmes?

Several strategies emerged from the data as potential ways to overcome challenges in order to manage and sustain gifted and talented programmes. The strategies included ongoing professional learning and development, a gifted and talented focus within staff induction programmes, time for structured conversation, written documentation to guide practice, an annual review cycle of written documentation, job descriptions for gifted and talented coordinators, principal support, making gifted and talented education a compulsory part of initial teacher education and reinstating advisers.

The first strategy, ongoing professional learning and development, was considered by the participants to be the most important and is confirmed in the literature (Day, 1999; Day & Sachs, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2000; Speck & Knipe, 2005). My findings indicate that what is being done in the form of external professional learning and development initiatives is only skimming the surface because each school has its own unique circumstances which need to be accommodated in professional learning and development support if teachers are to enhance their work with gifted and talented students inside schools. Schools themselves need to know how to proceed and I suggest that more help is needed for them to do that.

One promising initiative was the TDI, which my participants suggested had provided them with continuous support and resources over a period of three years. However, in reality, the participants agreed that the progress, which occurred as a result of the TDI had become more difficult to maintain at its conclusion once the support and resources had been withdrawn. One participant explained, “all the contracts they [the Government] give out for millions of dollars, and tell us what to do and then it doesn’t continue.” Such a comment

suggests that schools also need to know how to work without external supports and identify what strategies and resources they can use themselves. Knowing how to do this is another learning need, which needs to be addressed.

Although participants had generally positive attitudes towards professional learning and development, they intimated a desire for more internal professional learning and development to complement the external support. The participants recognised that more often than not, externally run seminars or symposiums, while possibly beneficial for networking with others, did little to show them how to respond to student needs in their particular schools. Similarly Timperley et al. (2007) intimates “listening to inspiring speakers or attending one-off workshops rarely changes teacher practice sufficiently to impact on student outcomes” (p. xxv). Lorraine expressed her frustration about being “back to the stage where we have to run the odd conference here and there or the odd seminar” likening this approach to ‘reinventing the wheel’. She saw more benefit in whole school professional learning and development that continued over time because more teachers could participate in the professional learning and there were opportunities to practice, refine and reinforce new learning.

Throughout this thesis the importance of context has been recognised. While it is staff members within a school who understand the complexities of students and their needs, they also need to know how to respond to those needs. This means teachers’ professional learning and development must also have direct relevance to those students’ needs for teachers in turn to transfer new learning to practices that will enhance the achievement of gifted and talented students. In addition to professional learning and development being relevant and meaningful, there is a need for it to be continuous, collaborative, and provide opportunities to implement and practice new learning (Timperley et al., 2007).

A second strategy the coordinators mentioned was for a staff induction programme to complement ongoing professional learning and development. My participants saw this strategy as a way to lessen the impact of staff turnover, raise awareness, develop and build a critical mass, and ultimately to improve outcomes for gifted and talented students. They suggested a school level annual induction programme and ongoing professional learning and development were ways to manage the unavoidable reality of staff turnover and the

substandard attention gifted and talented education often receives. It is these actions, which I argue are needed if a focus on gifted and talented education is to be sustained.

A third strategy is providing structured time for structured conversations about practice in gifted and talented education. This strategy has emerged from a gap in the data. While the interviews revealed that participants welcomed opportunities to talk and network with other educational professionals, there was no sense of this being structured talk. I noted in my search of the literature the importance of structured dialogue. Swaffield and Dempster (2009) and Southworth (2009) support the necessity of consistent, organised and structured opportunities as a way of ensuring teachers are provided with a conscious stimulus enabling them to talk about learning. Exposing teachers to what Swaffield and Dempster (2009) refer to as disciplined dialogue, in which talk is derived from evidence, offers an empowering strategy in which teachers can use data to inform practice and decisions for next steps for gifted and talented students.

Preparation of written documentation is a fourth strategy. This study revealed contrasting views around the necessity of written documentation to guide gifted and talented practice, and interestingly, so too does some of the literature. While the majority of literature indicates the usefulness of a policy, Goodhew (2009) acknowledges “the process of meeting and agreeing as a whole school how the needs of these students are to be met is much more important than the final document” (p. 35). Meeting and agreeing as a whole school will contribute not only to the development of shared understandings and practices but will also increase the level of ownership, accountability and commitment devoted to meeting the needs of gifted and talented students. Similarly, previously discussed research conducted by Riley et al. (2004a) identified that in some cases, a policy gives rise to procedural documents and action plans to guide practice. However, consensus is that there needs to be some form of written documentation to guide practice and my study showed that schools are inconsistent in the extent to which they have such documentation available to staff and the wider school community.

A fifth strategy mentioned by one participant to overcome feeling isolated as gifted and talented coordinators, was to integrate rather than separate provisions for gifted and talented students into components of curriculum learning areas and programmes. I recommend that a point of discussion for schools should be focused around the way in which gifted and

talented provisions and programmes can be managed. There are multiple pathways for sustaining gifted and talented provisions and programmes and I suggest that these need to be explored. Schools need to clarify expectations and what is possible given resource and funding constraints. Approaches that are deliberate, planned and not left to chance will be better able to keep the spotlight on gifted and talented education.

Principal support was a sixth strategy. The participants were convinced that leadership matters. The participants identified that the support of a principal can go a long way towards assisting with maintaining an explicit focus on gifted and talented education. This study has clearly reinforced the importance of principal leadership to support the work of gifted and talented coordinators. According to Reeves (2009), “informed, capable school leadership is an essential prerequisite for the development of a suitable learning environment for children and young people who have been identified as experiencing special educational needs” (p. 127). Furthermore, raising consciousness of the actions that need to be taken at all different levels within a school environment requires leadership that connects with students and their learning. It is imperative that principals help gifted and talented coordinators to gain knowledge and develop a repertoire of actions to improve the teaching and learning for gifted and talented students. They need to know what learning is needed and then find ways to ensure teachers can access this information. Principals need to accept they have a responsibility to support the layers of leaders underneath them and not just rely on external support.

A seventh strategy was that teacher learning needs to focus on gifted and talented students at the beginning of teaching careers, for example within initial teacher education programmes. The Ministry of Education (2000) have also previously acknowledged that gifted education is seldom consistently addressed within initial teacher education. Increasing the prevalence of gifted and talented education during initial teacher education is a strategy that could benefit the level of commitment and awareness shown towards gifted and talented education within schools. According to Lorraine there are a number of gifted and talented experts who believe that a “compulsory course in working with students who are gifted and talented is necessary during teacher training.” I also agree and argue that if gifted and talented education were to be made a compulsory component of a teaching degree then teachers going into schools would be better equipped with the knowledge base and understanding of giftedness and talent. Moreover, this knowledge base would support

and complement what it is schools are doing to meet the needs of gifted and talented students. Just as learning about literacy, numeracy, and other curriculum areas is a compulsory requirement of teacher training, so too should gifted and talented education.

An eighth strategy the participants spoke passionately about was the re-establishment of a gifted and talented advisory support service. All of the participants considered the discontinuation of gifted and talented advisers as a significant loss. They were adamant that advisers are still a key factor for managing and sustaining a commitment to gifted and talented provisions and programmes. According to the participants, gifted and talented advisers need to be reinstated.

Recommendations for Practice

This research study has identified a number of challenges and strategies relating to sustaining gifted and talented provisions and programmes. Now through my own lens, incorporating what I have learned from my participants and the literature, I have developed recommendations with the intention of supporting more sustainable practice in schools. Some of the recommendations I make, are in fact, confirming and supporting earlier work. I argue that to a large extent, the field of gifted and talented education has stalled because despite work undertaken with the production of resource material and external professional learning opportunities, progress has been limited. Presented below are six recommendations. These recommendations are applicable to coordinators, schools, the New Zealand Teachers Council, and the Ministry of Education.

Throughout this thesis I have explored the vulnerability of sole coordinator positions arguing against the lone voice of a gifted and talented coordinator. I argue that unless provisions for gifted and talented students are integrated, shared, and part of the school culture, they will not take hold, nor will they be sustainable over the longer term. Therefore, a school wide focus is necessary to ensure that schools meet the NAG requirements for gifted and talented education. Likewise, the Education Review Office (2008) advocate the necessity of developing a school wide understanding. The following recommendations reinforce what it is that schools, together with their gifted and talented coordinator need to do to ensure that requirements are met and provisions and programmes can be better sustained.

Recommendation One

That schools, through their gifted and talented coordinator, move beyond identification and give substantial attention to programmes for gifted and talented students.

To be more effective in their role, it is imperative for gifted and talented coordinators to make a conscious and deliberate effort to move beyond identification, allowing the focus to shift to giving substantial attention to programmes. Furthermore, using identification data efficiently to determine exactly how programmes should be planned and implemented in order to improve outcomes for gifted and talented students is a desirable goal. This is consistent with Riley (2011) who asserts that “good identification procedures means data collected is used as the basis of planning learning experiences for gifted and talented students” (p. 283) .

Recommendation Two

That schools engage in focused discussion around the way in which gifted and talented provisions and programmes can be managed.

There are multiple pathways for sustaining gifted and talented provisions and programmes and I suggest that these need to be explored. Schools need to clarify expectations and what is possible given resource and funding constraints. Approaches that are deliberate, planned, and not left to chance, will be better able to keep the spotlight on gifted and talented education.

Recommendation Three

That schools establish a committee with responsibility for gifted and talented education.

In light of the frustrations experienced by coordinators in this study, as communicated by them, I confirm that establishing a committee or team approach for gifted and talented provisions may go some way to addressing the difficulties associated with coordinators working in isolation. The drawing of this recommendation from my study reflects the opinions of the Ministry of Education (2000) and Riley et al. (2004a) who suggest that a team approach and establishing a committee is the best way to coordinate gifted and talented provisions and to ensure longevity and support. Furthermore, I also suggest that the creation of a committee would contribute to the shared leadership venture (Waterhouse & Moller, 2009), encouraging more people to take a collective responsibility for gifted and

talented provisions and programmes, in turn lessening the workload and burn out of a sole coordinator.

Recommendation Four

That schools develop, use and review written documentation to guide gifted and talented education practice.

I believe that written documentation such as policies, procedures or action plans, and job descriptions can be particularly useful for effectively guiding practice. However, in order to effectively guide practice, I suggest the need for written documents be living documents that are readily available, easily accessible and consistently reviewed. All staff, and especially gifted and talented coordinators, should not only have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of gifted and talented policy or procedural documentation, but even more so, play a part in the development and implementation of such documentation to suit the particular school context for which it is intended. This is supported by the Education Review Office (2008) who also suggest that “an effective GATE policy is developed in consultation with the school community” (p. 6). Furthermore, written policy or procedural documentation that is current and kept up to date, can be used to provide some structure to guide the evaluation of gifted and talented provisions and programmes.

I contend that operating a clear review cycle of written documentation would assist with overcoming this ad hoc approach to programme implementation and making provisions more sustainable. An annual review process would also be one way to keep the focus on gifted and talented provisions and programmes to the fore. Reviewing such documentation will contribute towards maintaining the visibility and support given to gifted and talented education. Furthermore, again, despite participants holding differing viewpoints around the necessity of a job description, I suggest that having a specific job description and clearly linking it to attestation and appraisal processes must be a priority for principals as a way of ensuring that what is done for gifted and talented students is planned and deliberate.

Recommendation Five

That providers of initial teacher education make gifted and talented education courses a compulsory component of their programmes.

I reiterate the recommendation made by the Working Party on Gifted Education (2001) that initial teacher education includes compulsory gifted and talented courses to prepare pre-service teachers to understand and meet the needs of gifted and talented students. I suggest that the Teachers Council as the approval body for teacher education programmes, specifically check that provisions for gifted and talented education are more than a one off lecture or optional course during initial teacher education.

This study did not include representatives from the Ministry of Education, but nevertheless the participants provided suggestions pertaining to ways in which the Ministry of Education could provide assistance in order to overcome challenges and improve the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. The participants acknowledged the need to look beyond what can be done by individuals within schools and divert attention to the Ministry of Education as an agent for change and improvement. They also necessitated some reliance on the Ministry of Education as the governing body, to provide the ongoing support required to enable gifted and talented provisions and programmes to be more effective, and more importantly, sustainable over a longer period of time.

Recommendation Six

That the Ministry of Education re-establishes gifted and talented advisers so as to help schools develop the necessary strategies for long term provision of gifted and talented education in schools.

I get a strong sense that bringing back advisers would be beneficial for those working with and for gifted and talented students. Making advisers available to support schools and staff would be one way in which the Government could continue to support and show a consistent commitment towards gifted and talented education, while at the same time, providing coordinators, teachers and principals with the ongoing support they are crying out for.

My data confirms what the literature is saying about the need to use external support. Timperley et al. (2007) advise on the unlikelihood of professionals being able to manage substantial new learning without the support and challenge of an external expert. Essentially, the desirable goal is for principals to find a balance between using external support and developing internal expertise. I do not see external support as the answer to the

sustainability of provisions and programmes but rather as a support for school processes until they are sufficiently established. Gubbins (2008) agrees, suggesting that “relying on external experts alone without building expertise within schools will ultimately be a disadvantage” (p. 540).

Future Research

Having considered all of the above, future research could usefully investigate principals’ perceptions on the sustainability of gifted and talented provisions and programmes. It would also be of benefit to obtain the views of The Ministry of Education as the Government’s lead advisory body of the New Zealand education system, responsible for shaping the direction for education agencies and providers and contributing to the Governments’ goals for education. It has become evident that my study supports earlier work, and that some previous recommendations have not been actioned. Therefore, addressing the difficulties associated with implementing recommendations may be a beneficial component of future research.

Final Thoughts

My learning throughout this journey has been exceptional. Not only have I learned how to be a more effective and efficient researcher, I also take away specific gifted and talented learning in the belief that this learning could be used within my setting to improve what it is we do for gifted and talented students and how we go about doing it. An unexpected strength of this study has been the very open and honest way in which the participants have shared their experiences of working as a gifted and talented coordinator. I anticipate that their views will guide future work I do with gifted and talented students. I am excitedly hopeful that I will have the opportunity to implement my learning to assist with improving outcomes for gifted and talented students and prolonging the sustainability of provisions and programmes. This learning has proven to be both powerful and influential and I anticipate it will have a lasting impact as I move through the rest of my career in education.

It was my personal learning experience of working as a gifted and talented coordinator combined with my love of learning, which have influenced my topic of study. I had a desire to move beyond what I knew in order to deepen my experience and improve my expertise. However, I did not quite realise that knowledge about gifted and talented education was only one side of the coin.

While I felt I started this learning journey with some knowledge of giftedness and talent, the learning I have done around professional learning and development and leadership has been very new to me. As Albert Einstein once said, “the more I learn, the more I realise how much I don’t know.”

Pam’s words capture the need to continue addressing the needs of gifted and talented students in schools. She said, “these students have special needs just like the students at the other end of the spectrum.” Furthermore, Andrea affirmed the importance of a school wide commitment to gifted and talented to sustain provisions and programmes over the longer term. She said, “it is something they have to hold up as special for their school.”

It is therefore appropriate that I end my thesis with a plea from one of my participants to honour my intention to capture the voices of gifted and talented coordinators. Sandra said:

It is a very good idea that you are doing this research. I think this kind of research does need to be done, particularly in the present climate. This information needs to be with the Ministry and the Minister. They need to realise how incredibly difficult it is for some schools.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Establishing Rapport:

1. I'm interested in your teaching career, could you tell me a little bit about it?

Length in service
Positions
Responsibility
Levels taught
Accomplishments

2. How did you become involved with gifted and talented education?

School decision
Pursuing interest
Personal experience
Government policy
Professional development
Current G&T role

Set Up:

3. I'm interested in the development of your school's gifted and talented programme. Could you tell me **why** the school embarked on this initiative?

Initial reason for beginning G&T
Government NAG
Aims of programme, goal setting
Role participant had with set up

4. Could you tell me about the **school's approach** to developing this initiative?

Steps taken
Length of time
Goal setting
Useful and necessary strategies
Role participant had with set up

Professional Development Support:

5. Tell me about what has been offered to **support your professional learning** to meet the needs of the gifted and talented student?

Personal learning and school initiated
Type of PD, whole school, lead teacher only etc
Professional learning community
Ownership
Format for PD
Choice
Length and time
Internal or external
Funding

6. What **impact** has professional development had on gifted children and your gifted and talented programme?

PD bringing about change
Importance
Usefulness
PD phases and development throughout career
Cooperation and collaboration
Learning community
School culture

Leadership:

7. What are the **roles and responsibilities of the gifted and talented coordinator** and what **skills and knowledge** are necessary for this role?

Level of control given
Decision-making
Communication
Informing
Assistance
Advocate
Release
Funding

8. In what **ways** have **school management helped** the gifted and talented programme within your school?

DP, AP, Principal, BOT
Distribution of roles
Structure
Roles and responsibilities
Communication
Supporting achievement of G&T children
Influence on sustainability

Impact and Sustainability:

9. What **elements** do you think have been **effective** and are **necessary** for the sustainability of your gifted and talented programme?

Management systems and programme structures
Identification
Monitoring
Register
Paper work
Grouping G&T children
All staff opting in
Shared vision and understanding
Time
Funding
Support
Decile of school

10. How are gifted and talented provisions **spread** throughout the school, beyond those directly involved with teaching gifted children?

Methods of communication
Cooperation and collaboration

Policy and procedures
Time given to G&T
Induction for new staff
School organisation
Priority from management
All involved part of the process

11. To what **extent** do you think the gifted and talented initiative/programme is being **sustained in your school**? What **evidence** is there that it has been sustained over time?

Changes to G&T as a result of programme
Schooling experience for G&T children
Improvement in achievement
Meeting needs
Induction of new staff
Policy review

Barriers and Constraints:

12. Could you tell me about any **challenges and difficulties** you have faced trying to sustain gifted and talented programmes?

Funding
Government initiatives
Crowded curriculum
Top down approach
Lack of ownership or involvement
Strategies to overcome challenges
Grey area
Staff turnover
Set up and development

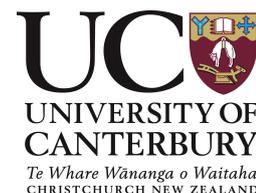
13. What **help or assistance** do you think would be beneficial to improve gifted and talented programmes?

Advisers
Funding
More time
Policy and procedures

Conclusion:

14. Is there anything else you would like to mention that hasn't been discussed in one of the questions?

APPENDIX B



Sustaining Gifted and Talented Education Programmes within New Zealand Primary Schools

Information for Participants

Hello. My name is Leigh Hurford. I am completing a Master of Teaching and Learning through the University of Canterbury College of Education. I am researching the sustainability of gifted and talented programmes within mainstream schools. Dr Susan Lovett and Jenny Smith from the University of Canterbury College of Education are supervising my research. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The aim of this research is to identify key elements and strategies mainstream New Zealand primary schools employ to sustain gifted and talented education programmes. The perspectives of principals, teachers and gifted and talented coordinators are being sought.

All participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire should take no longer than thirty minutes to complete. Some participants will be asked to take part in an individual semi structured interview taking no more than one hour. Interviews will be arranged for a time that suits the participant.

No findings that could identify any school or participant will be published. Each school and participant will have a pseudonym so no one else will know who made the comments I use in my report. The pseudonym will be used for all interviews and questionnaires. Names will remain confidential and will not be published. All data will be kept in a secure filing cabinet for the required five years and then destroyed.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline to answer any question in the questionnaire or interview. You can withdraw from the study, including all provided information, at any time up until the report is written. This can be done by writing to the researcher.

The findings of this study will be written up for the purposes of my MTchLn thesis and may be used in publications and presentations.

If you have any questions about this study, you can talk to me or to one of my research supervisors. If you have any issues or complaints about how my research is being conducted, you may contact The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

Thank you for considering taking part in this study. If you agree to take part, please sign the consent form attached and return to me.

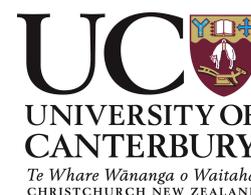
Researcher: Leigh Hurford
Phone: (03) 322 9895
Email: leighandpaul@xtra.co.nz

Regards,
Leigh Hurford

1. This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury College of Education Ethical Clearance Committee.

2. Complaints may be addressed to:
Dr Missy Morton, Chair, Ethical Clearance Committee
College of Education, University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800, CHRISTCHURCH
Telephone: 345 8312

APPENDIX C



Sustaining Gifted and Talented Education Programmes within New Zealand Primary Schools

Participant Consent Form

I have read the information and am happy to take part in this study.

I understand that by participating in this study, I agree to:

- Complete a questionnaire that will take approximately thirty minutes.
- Participate in one interview that will last approximately one hour.
- Interviews being recorded on a dictaphone.

I understand that by being involved as a participant in this study:

- Comments I make may be used in the research report.
- I can view the data collected about me and discuss this with the researcher.
- Data I provide will be treated and remain confidential and that my identity will be protected.
- All information will be stored securely, and available only to the researcher and supervisors.
- I am able to withdraw from the study at any time.
- Other articles, or papers related to the project, may be written subsequently. If this is the case, I understand I will receive copies of any subsequent articles or papers.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

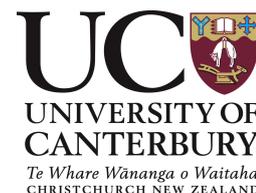
Email: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please return to:
Leigh Hurford
20 Cunneen Place
Halswell
Christchurch 8025

APPENDIX D



Sustaining Gifted and Talented Education Programmes within New Zealand Primary Schools

Information for Principals

Dear [insert principal name]

My name is Leigh Hurford. I am working towards a Masters of Teaching and Learning through the University of Canterbury College of Education. I am researching the sustainability of gifted and talented programmes within schools. Dr Susan Lovett and Jenny Smith from the University of Canterbury College of Education are supervising this study. I would like to invite your school to participate in this study.

The aim of this research is to identify key elements and strategies mainstream New Zealand primary schools employ to sustain gifted and talented education programmes. The perspectives of principals, teachers and gifted and talented coordinators are being sought.

All participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire should take no longer than thirty minutes to complete. Participants can decline to answer any questions. Some participants will be asked to take part in an individual semi structured interview taking no more than one hour. Interviews will be arranged for a time and place that suits the participant. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions of data, documentation and notes will be securely stored out of sight in a locked filing cabinet in my home. Transcriptions and notes will also be stored on my computer, and backed up using a flash drive device, which will be kept in the filing cabinet. Data from the study will be kept for a period of five years after completion of the thesis. After this time the data will be destroyed.

No findings that could identify any school or participant will be published. Each school and participant will have a pseudonym so no one else will know who made the comments I use in my report. The pseudonym will be used for all interviews and the questionnaires. Names will remain confidential and will not be published. The data from this study will be used for the thesis and may also be used for any other articles, or papers related to the project, which may be written subsequently. Participants will receive copies of any subsequent articles or papers.

Participation in this study is voluntary. [Insert school name] School, including all provided information, can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

If you have any questions about this study, you can talk to me or to one of my research supervisors. Dr Susan Lovett (03) 345 8108 or Jenny Smith (03) 345 8274. My research project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. If you have any issues or complaints about how my research is being conducted, you may contact The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

Thank you for considering allowing [insert school name] School to take part in this study. If you agree to take part, please sign the consent form attached and return to me in the envelope provided.

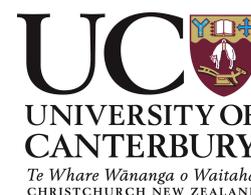
Researcher: Leigh Hurford
Address: 20 Cunneen Place
Halswell
Christchurch 8025
Phone: (03) 322 9895
Email: leighandpaul@xtra.co.nz

Regards,
Leigh Hurford

1. This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury College of Education Ethical Clearance Committee.

2. Complaints may be addressed to:
Dr Missy Morton, Chair, Ethical Clearance Committee
College of Education, University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800, CHRISTCHURCH
Telephone: 345 8312

APPENDIX E



Sustaining Gifted and Talented Education Programmes within New Zealand Primary Schools

Principal Consent Form

I have read and understood the description of the above named project and all other provided information regarding the study. On this basis I agree to allow Leigh Hurford to carry out research at [insert school name] School.

I understand that participants in this study will be involved in:

- Completing a questionnaire that will take approximately thirty minutes.
- One interview that will last approximately one hour.
- Interviews being recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed.

I understand that:

- Participation is voluntary.
- Comments made by participants may be used in the research report and may also be used for any other articles, or papers related to the project, which may be written subsequently. Participants will receive copies of any subsequent articles or papers.
- Data provided will remain confidential and that identities will be protected.
- All information will be stored securely, and available only to the researcher and supervisors. Information will be destroyed after five years.
- The school and participants are able to withdraw from the study at any time.

Name: _____

School: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please return in the envelope provided to: Leigh Hurford
20 Cunneen Place
Halswell
Christchurch 8025

