CHAPTER 14

Gifted and Proud: On Being Exceptional and Māori

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14.1 Introduction

Although schools in New Zealand strive to create equitable learning environments, the reality is that students experience education differently. There is a significant amount of literature about the academic underachievement of Māori that suggests the traditional approach to education works less well for them. Recent research suggests that the enduring problem of Māori underachievement can be attributed to a number of factors including: low teacher expectations of Māori (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006); deficit theorising (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003); culturally unfamiliar content and contexts for learning (Bevan-Brown, 2005); and loss of cultural esteem and Māori identity (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007; Durie, 2005). It may be plausible to suggest that these patterns may also

play a role in the continued underrepresentation of Māori students in New Zealand gifted and talented education programmes. The literature in this area reveals that Māori under-participation in these programmes has been a well-documented concern for over a decade (Bevan-Brown, 1992; Cathcart & Pou, 1994; Niwa, 1998/99) and cites additional causes including: culturally inappropriate definitions of giftedness (Bevan-Brown, 2004); poor identification of gifted Māori students (Reid, 1990); culturally insensitive and unsupportive programmes (Jenkins, 2002; Jenkins, Macfarlane, & Moltzen, 2004; Macfarlane, 2004); and, finally, and of particular relevance to this chapter, is Bevan-Brown's (2004) contention that gifted and talented Māori students are not encouraged, directly or indirectly, to develop a knowledge of, and pride in, their own culture. This chapter suggests a curriculum that insists Māori success at school not come at the expense of their own language and culture.

It is not my intention to review the existing literature relating to Māori and gifted education in this chapter. There is already a small, but sound, body of New Zealand literature that clearly defines the boundaries of this topic and the ongoing concerns of the field. (For a thoughtful and recent review of the literature, see Rangimarie Mahuika's (2007) piece in the *MAI Review*.) It would also be redundant to give a detailed description of the myriad statistics that speak to the disproportionate underrepresentation of Māori students in gifted education programmes throughout New Zealand. Rather, this chapter endeavours to move beyond those established statistical landscapes and instead draws on several threads of social identity theory to illustrate the synergistic connection between positive Māori identity and academic achievement. To support the assertion that secure Māori identity is essential in aiding the academic performance of gifted Māori students, I will review research that has examined the relationship between ethnic identity and academic achievement. This literature is often associated with academically at-risk students, rather than the academically talented.

14.2 Ngā tangata pūmanawa: conceptions of giftedness

Gifted and talented learners have generally been identified as those who demonstrate, or have the potential to demonstrate, exceptional

abilities relative to others of their age (Ziegler & Heller, 2000). However, most traditional definitions, perceptions and theories of intelligence and giftedness, based exclusively or extensively on intelligence tests, have closed doors for diverse students because of their narrow and unidimensional focus. New Zealand literature in this field, since at least the mid-1990s (Bevan-Brown, 1996), has advocated for multicategorical definitions, multidimensional approaches to identification and the inclusion of Māori perspectives. However, the continuing under-participation of Māori students in gifted and talented programmes suggests that those charged with identifying gifted students, often classroom educators with little or no expertise in gifted and talented education, might still be employing traditional notions of giftedness based on exceptional intellectual ability as a key criterion. In fact, a 2008 Education Review Office review of gifted and talented education found that less than half of all New Zealand schools use multicategorical definitions, and those definitions that are used reflect a limited range of areas of ability, often relying on a singular identification method (Education Review Office, 2008). As a consequence, these schools overlook cultural, spiritual, emotional and Māori manifestations of giftedness, resulting in many exceptional Māori students with advanced capabilities in creative, community-focused and/or cultural domains never having their performance or potential recognised. For that reason, we need to consider a range of practicable and innovative solutions that focus on shifting the understandings, practices and attitudes of educators if we are to address the great loss of unrecognised Māori talent in our schools.

Many contemporary definitions and theories consider that different cultures view intelligence and giftedness in different ways; what is valued as gifted in one culture may not be valued as gifted in another (Renzulli, 2002). In this way, giftedness is a social construct influenced by a cultural group's epistemology, values, needs, customs, concepts, attitudes, beliefs and practices (Bevan-Brown, 2002). As a result there have been attempts in the field to expand conceptions of giftedness to better consider the "ways in which people transform their gifted assets into constructive action" (Renzulli, 2002, p. 34). An open-ended conception acknowledges that cultural differences can exist in how giftedness manifests across a range of

contexts and social groupings in ways that benefit others. As such, when nurtured appropriately one's giftedness has the potential to positively impact others and provide a valuable service to one's community. According to Gardner (1983, 1999) a high intelligence quotient (IQ) in the absence of productivity does not equate to intelligence. Rather, intelligence involves the potential to process information so that it can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture—a form of service.

A focus on learning through service involves blending learners' academic content with meaningful service in a community, and can change the attitudes and behaviours of both the learner and the recipient of the service. Tasks that employ this type of learning should provide learners with opportunities to engage in self-discovery, and acquire and use culturally relevant knowledge, skills and values highly regarded in one's own community. Renzulli (2002) refers to such culturally relevant knowledge, skills and values as "social capital" (p. 34) and states that social capital is a set of intangible assets that address the collective needs and problems of individuals and of our communities at large.

Two recurring concepts in the Māori giftedness literature, that clearly link to Renzulli's notion of service, are manaakitanga and mana tangata. Manaakitanga can be perceived as the personal quality of being outstandingly hospitable or generous (Macfarlane, 2004) or caring for and helping others (Rymarczyk Hyde, 2001). Within Māoridom, great emphasis and value is placed on working co-operatively with others (Cathcart & Pou, 1994), and aspects of spirituality and interpersonal relationships are highly prized as being beneficial to the whole tribe (Niwa, 1998/99). Bevan-Brown's (1993, 2005) research indicated that this cultural obligation to serve others still exists. To be considered "a gifted Māori", not only must you be exceptional in a culturally valued area but you must also use your outstanding skill, ability or quality to help or serve others in some way.

The second concept is mana tangata. This is especially relevant to the Māori view of giftedness because it refers to an endowment of honour or status for one's in-depth knowledge of Māori traditions, language

and culture, and the demonstration of this knowledge in a culturally appropriate manner (Bevan-Brown, 2004). It has long been acknowledged that when individuals know the qualities or knowledge valued by their culture, they are more likely to strive towards acquiring and demonstrating them. Cathcart and Pou (1994) encapsulate this concept well in the statement "People are most likely to display high levels of ability in skills highly valued by their culture" (p. 15). So what specific gifted characteristics, qualities and/or skills are valued in the Māori community?

Bevan-Brown (2005) succinctly summarises the three main ways giftedness is viewed according to a Māori world-view. The first area she discusses is being "culturally gifted" in terms of exceptionality in Māori arts, crafts, music, historic and cultural knowledge and traditions, whakapapa and te reo (the Māori language). These knowledges and skills are valued for their contribution to the revitalisation and maintenance of Māori language, knowledge and customs. The second area refers to culturally valued qualities, including awhinatanga and whakaritenga mahi (helping and serving others), maia (courage and bravery), manaakitanga (hospitality), wairuatanga (spirituality), whanaungatanga (familiness), aroha ki te tangata and tutohutanga (love for, caring and sensitivity to others) and pukumahi and pukeke (industriousness and determination) (Bevan-Brown, 1993; Jenkins, 2002). For Māori, these qualities are just as important as academic exceptionality because individuals with these traits are more likely to mobilise their interpersonal, political and moral lives in ways that place human concerns and the common good above personal advancement (Renzulli, 2002). The third area Bevan-Brown (2005) discusses is the culturally appropriate demonstration of one's giftedness, which in te ao Māori (the Māori world) is influenced by the values of humility, group co-operation and group benefit. Thus, Māori value a wide range of abilities and qualities, which are culturally and contextually specific, but generally less individualistic than Western concepts of giftedness. This broad conceptualisation of Māori giftedness, while frustratingly nonspecific for some educators, is appropriate, given the high degree of cultural, social, linguistic and physical difference that characterises Māori.

14.3 He aha te raru? Contesting stereotypes, affirming self, reconceptualising possibilities

To increase Māori participation and achievement in gifted programmes we must address the negative stereotypes that suppress their achievement. In New Zealand, Māori student achievement is impacted by negative stereotypes that allege intellectual inferiority. Steele (1997, 2004) and Aronson (2004) call this phenomenon "stereotype threat" and state that these stereotypes impact the performance, motivation and learning of students who have to contend with them. Steele's writings highlight the way in which being the target of a negative group stereotype (when one does not believe the stereotype) can make situations aversive when that stereotype is salient. Both researchers assert that students who are most vulnerable to stereotype threat are those who care the most and who are most deeply invested in high academic performance—gifted students. In other words, gifted Māori students who have a strong academic identity are more likely to be negatively impacted by stereotypes that tell them that "Māori are not academic". They are most at risk of seeking to escape the aversive situation through either disidentification or disengagement (Osborne, 2004). Steele suggests that stigmatised students' "susceptibility to this threat derives not from internal doubts about their ability (e.g., their internalization of the stereotype) but from their identification with the domain and the resulting concern they have about being stereotyped in it" (1997, p. 614). In summary, Steele's stereotype threat hypothesis suggests that gifted Māori students may be caught in a particularly divisive paradox. Low identification with academic achievement could be generally related to poor academic outcomes, yet more comfort in school and strong identification with academic achievement could lead to better academic outcomes, but cause the experience of schooling to be particularly aversive.

Other international literature illustrating links between the academic and ethnic identity development of minority students suggests that positive ethnic identity can play a protective role in minority students' lives (Miller & Kaiser, 2001). According to this research, students who identify strongly with their ethnic group are better able to negotiate potentially

negative environments, deal with discrimination and prejudice and have high self-esteem. Other evidence (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007) has shown that positive ethnic socialisation is associated with more school efficacy, higher educational aspirations, more ethnic knowledge and a greater understanding of the ethnic prejudice (Quintana & Vera, 1999). More recently, Altschul, Oyserman, and Bybee (2006) examined three components of ethnic identity that act together to buffer the impact of stereotype threat and strengthen persistence at school. The components are a positive sense of belonging to one's ethnic group, a high awareness of racism and a strong sense of embedded achievement. Embedded achievement is the belief that achievement is an in-group identifier, a part of being a good in-group member and a belief that the achievement of some in-group members helps other in-group members succeed. Given these strong international research findings, I predict that a strong and positive Māori identity might help gifted Māori learners to buffer the potential impact of stereotypes, and subsequently engage, persist and succeed at school—as someone both gifted and Māori.

14.4 Ngā tamariki tū tika: helping children to stand tall

Gifted Māori students must be encouraged to value their culture and see it as a meaningful and relevant part of their academic learning. Bevan-Brown (1992, 2005) has found that those children whose Māoritanga has been tapped into and developed, appeared to "bloom". Rymarczyk Hyde (2001) also explains how this can increase self-esteem and confidence, resulting in gifted Māori learners being more likely to develop their potential. To achieve this, teaching and learning strategies need to be culturally appropriate, and the focus should be on a curriculum that is culturally meaningful and relevant. This would support the development of strong ethnic identity and subsequently the improved self-concept with regard to being Māori *and* gifted.

Durie's (2001) framework for educational advancement asserts that Māori academic achievement should not be at the expense of cultural identity. He instead suggests that Māori educational advancement should

involve the ability to attain Western standards of education while also maintaining links and an identity as Māori. Durie (2001) stresses that participation *of Māori* is different from participation *as Māori*. Kapa haka (Māori dance performance) can be considered an example of a culturally responsive learning medium that provides opportunities for Māori students to positively express Māori identity through engagement with their language, culture and traditional practices (Rubie-Davies, 1999; Whitinui, 2008). Māori students in Whitinui's (2007) research believed that involvement in kapa haka reaffirmed who they were as Māori, increased their desire to succeed at school and improved their individual confidence, self-esteem/self-worth and commitment to participate in the learning environment. Similar research by Rubie-Davies (1999) also found that participation in kapa haka had a direct and positive effect on students' participation levels at school. Rubie-Davies' research concluded that kapa haka was a culturally appropriate medium for learning that has the potential to improve student achievement levels across several areas of the curriculum. Kapa haka has a positive impact on students' overall perceptions of their school life.

In New Zealand, Bennett's (2002) research examined the degree to which Māori cultural identity moderated the relationship between student problems and academic achievement in university settings. His research findings revealed that the strengthening of cultural identity among Māori students could act as a form of primary prevention in terms of decreasing the impact that certain environmental stressors have on their academic performance. His research findings support initiatives that enhance and foster cultural identity development within academic settings and suggest that the relationship between student problems and grade point average is moderated by cultural identity. Bennett and Flett (2001) also found that a high cultural identity as Māori mediated the impact of academic problems and helped Māori students maintain their educational outcomes. These authors also suggest that positive Māori identity may give students access to a network of social support that can buffer them against the detrimental effects of stress and problems. The results of Bennett and Flett's study also support the value of exposure to models of educational success in the children's communities.

14.5 Whakapapa: to know, to belong, to thrive

In most views of Māori identity, whakapapa is generally agreed to be the key characteristic. Karetu (1990) describes whakapapa as the glue that connects individuals to a certain place or marae, locating them within the broader network of kin relations. Karetu further states that whakapapa is not simply about having "Māori blood", but also knowing about that descent and having a meaningful relationship to it. Knowledge of whakapapa and sense of identity are very important to Māori. Te Rito (2007) believes there is consensus of opinion among Māori that the "loss" of such identity and whakapapa connections by urban Māori has been a contributing factor to Māori being overrepresented with regard to the ills of present society. Te Rito (2007) further states that, "Whakapapa has had a major part to play in the resilience of Māori and their ability to spring back up" (p. 4). Gifted Māori learners who, aside from their specific area of exceptionality, have a deep knowledge of whakapapa could increase their social capital and mobilise their exceptionality in ways that benefit their communities, subsequently increasing their mana tangata through service.

Therefore, the integration of whakapapa as curriculum could have multiple benefits for gifted Māori children. Bevan-Brown's (2004) findings reveal that "children who had a knowledge of and pride in their Māoritanga had heightened self esteem and confidence and thus were more likely to develop their potential" (p. 189). Her research also found that "children who were strong in their cultural identity, and were in a situation where their culture was valued, were less likely to succumb to negative peer pressure against achieving" (p. 189). It is evident from the literature that gifted Māori learners are more likely to thrive in a culturally responsive environment. That is, one which ensures the learning experiences are as closely linked to the Māori learner's whakapapa, traditions and stories as possible. Educational experiences for gifted Māori children will be enhanced when they are encouraged to use their own whakapapa as a starting point for better understanding what giftedness means for both their cultural and educational identities.

14.6 Kei roto i tō tātou hītori, he oranga mō tātou: within our history is our future wellbeing

Giftedness occurs in all cultural, economic and social groups, and is displayed through a combination of a wide range of behaviours. Thus, conceptions of intelligence differ as a function of time and culture. People in different cultures may have quite different ideas of what it means to be "smart". Students should be encouraged to learn about their whakapapa as a way of not only understanding self, but also celebrating those gifted individuals and groups in their whakapapa who used their social capital in socially constructive ways. It is believed in Māoridom that a meaningful understanding of one's place in the present can only be understood by reflection on and knowledge of one's past (Ihimaera, Williams, Ramsden, & Long, 1993; Reid, 2000).

When thinking about my paternal whakapapa (Te Arawa, Ngāti Whakaue) and my personal knowledge of tīpuna who have shaped the way our tribe has developed and maintained strong identity, I am amazed at the diversity of exceptionality. So, within this small example, who is most gifted?

> *Tama Te Kapua*—chief navigator of the Te Arawa canoe in its journey from Hawaiiki? He was gifted with the knowledge of navigation—the science of plotting and following a course from one place to another and of determining the position of a moving waka. Mobilisation of his gift allowed his people to find new lands and avoid intertribal warfare.
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> *Kurungaituku*—the famous woman huntress? She was gifted with the speed of the fastest athlete and her winged arms enabled her to skim across the mountains and valleys of her domain. She guarded the whenua of her tribe by keeping an eye out for enemies. She was loyal, clever and fierce.
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> *Sophia Hinerangi, Maggie Papakura, Bella Papakura, Rangitiaria Dennan (Guide Rangi) and Dorothy Huhana Mihinui (Guide Bubbles)?* Since the 1890s, the profession of guiding at Whakarewarewa has been almost exclusively in female hands. These women became international personalities, notable for their colourful characters and knowledge. They are remembered for their humour and charm, their command of both the Māori and English languages and knowledge of their culture. The essence of manaakitanga and ngā uepū (a group working for a similar purpose) is evident in their combined giftedness.

> *Ngatoroirangi*—the famous tohunga (spiritual leader) of the Te Arawa canoe? The spouting hot geysers, the mud pools and the volcanic fire of the Rotorua region are all the result of Ngatoroirangi and his actions. He was gifted with a strong sense of manaakitanga and stamina. He was also gifted in terms of his wairuatanga and leadership.
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> *Emily Rangitaira Schuster*—recognised as a cultural expert whose skills were sought world-wide? Her mana, knowledge and prestige led the way in terms of Māori arts and crafts being valued in domains other than Māori. She exuded mana tangata.

The point is that if we made this judgement on the basis of a traditional definition of intelligence, we would not be able to select anyone in this group as "gifted" per se. However, intuitively we know that all these people had high degrees of intelligence in their own unique fields. Each would have had his or her own set of skills, or domain of specialised knowledge specific to their context (social capital). All used their exceptionality and wisdom in socially constructive ways that provided a service to others (constructive action). Clearly, each member of this group used their intellectual, motivational and creative assets in ways that enabled them to solve genuine problems, and create effective products, or offer valuable services, or both.

Like Macfarlane (2006), I believe that the collective wisdom of exceptional tīpuna, should be seen as the quintessence of Māori educational potential. When Māori look backwards into our past and recount the exceptional deeds of tīpuna, all Māori will find outstanding role models from the past to guide them in moving forwards. Their legacy can be an inspiration and their qualities celebrated. Indeed, like Te Rito (2007) I believe that whakapapa and its "innumerable networks to people past and present and to physical places like papakāinga" can provide gifted Māori learners, struggling to connect their academic and Māori identities, "with a life-line" that is immensely empowering (p. 4). It is crucial that gifted Māori learners be encouraged to value their culture and see it as a relevant and meaningful part of their educational success. Culturally responsive curriculum should include content that values, affirms and develops the learner's gifted potential, whakapapa and identity as Māori.

14.7 Ngā whakaaro whakamutunga: final thoughts

This chapter has proposed that the study of whakapapa—as a means of exploring how giftedness has been interpreted and mobilised within family or tribal histories—can simultaneously strengthen the development of positive ethnic identity and academic exceptionality for gifted Māori learners. The proposed curriculum involves three key components: a comprehensive knowledge of whakapapa and positive sense of identity as Māori; a knowledge of how their area of exceptionality is of value to their communities of interest (social capital); and an understanding of how they can transform their gifted assets in service to those communities (constructive action). I speculate that the acquisition of culturally valued knowledge, awareness of how to mobilise exceptionality in the service of others and positive sense of Māori identity, might be the key to overcoming the disengagement and disaffection rampant among gifted Māori learners. In helping learners to better understand and appreciate the richness of their whakapapa, schools create conditions where gifted Māori learners can learn how to be gifted and proud, academically exceptional and Māori.

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