

The Gifted Child and the Inclusive Classroom

A paper presented at the National Gifted and Talented Conference, "Rising Tides: Nurturing Our Gifted Culture", Wellington, August 2006.

Abstract: *This paper looks first at the belief that the needs of the gifted learner can be fully met in the regular classroom and that the practice of grouping gifted learners together is neither necessary nor effective. It examines the research arguments which have been advanced to support the view that such grouping is elitist, makes no difference to academic achievement and is harmful to both the gifted and non-gifted. It reports on various criticisms of this research. It then examines the research carried out over the past two decades which has reached the opposite conclusion, that grouping is an essential part of provision for the gifted learner and beneficial for both gifted and non-gifted. The concept of a "continuum" of services is described. The key role of the classroom teacher is discussed, and the need for appropriate professional development is emphasised. Various forms of grouping are considered. The paper then looks at the concept of the inclusive classroom and asserts that in relation to gifted learners, this concept is commonly misunderstood and inaccurately implemented. A definition of the inclusive classroom is examined in the light of common practice, and a revised definition is suggested to minimise the possibility of misinterpretation. Steps towards supporting more appropriate provision for gifted learners are suggested.*

Let me begin with a personal statement. Here's a belief I hold to very strongly:

Every classroom should be a good place to be for every child who enters it.
Every teacher should be able to offer understanding and a positive response to every child under his or her care.

I don't think this is a belief I hold all by myself.

As a statement of principle, it's one which must surely have a sense of rightness for every New Zealand trained teacher.

It seems to align itself with our traditional concern for equity and our belief in a child-centred approach to teaching. It is a credo we can surely all endorse.

But what does it mean *in practice*? Does it mean that the teacher should be able to meet all the needs of every individual child?

At present in New Zealand there appears to be a strong drive towards setting exactly this as our expectation. It is argued that every child has a *right* to be educated in the regular classroom, and to find that that education will fully meet his or her needs.

How realistic is this as an expectation? Can we make it work?

This is a particularly relevant question for any child or any group of children with needs which are significantly different from those of the majority. Can they too be fully catered for in the regular classroom?

My work especially over the last 16 years has involved travelling the length and breadth of New Zealand many times and working with many hundreds of teachers. On numerous

occasions I have been told:

“In our school, teachers meet all individual needs in the classroom.”

And even on a number of occasions:

“We run an inclusive process here. Our teachers meet all individual needs in the classroom.”

The corollary to this statement, sometimes implied and sometimes very explicit, often is:

“We don’t require any help with our gifted children. We do it all in the classroom.”

Furthermore, such a belief is sometimes given, albeit totally sincerely and with the best of intentions, as a reason for declining such help when it is made available. I’ve certainly had this said to me a number of times by principals explaining their decision not to allow a child to participate in a gifted programme.

And literally scores of parents across the years have told me of encountering this kind of response when they sought additional help for their gifted children, particularly if they wanted access to an external programme of any kind.

In this paper today, I want to examine these beliefs, and then finally, to look at the notion that this is what is meant by an inclusive classroom. I will ask:

- ✍ Can a teacher in a regular classroom meet all the needs of the gifted child?
- ✍ If it is true, then how can this be achieved?
- ✍ If it’s not true, what else needs to be done?
- ✍ Is it true that an *inclusive* classroom is one where the teacher is *expected* to meet all the needs of every child without outside assistance?
- ✍ If it’s not true, then what *is* meant by the term “inclusive classroom”, and how can we use this to support the gifted child?

Can we provide fully in the regular classroom?

Fortunately, this is a question which has been the subject of extensive international research and debate in relation to the gifted and talented, and we therefore have access to authoritative guidance on this issue. What does that guidance tell us?

The case in favour

Working from the research on just this topic, Clark (2002, p.255) has set out for us the criteria for effective gifted programming:

“To successfully produce appropriate, quality education, all programs for gifted learners must provide differentiation, flexible grouping, continuous progress, intellectual peer interaction, continuity, and teachers with specialized education.”

Can the regular classroom meet these criteria?

It is most certainly possible to provide *curriculum differentiation* within the regular classroom setting. Time and resource requirements are not excessive once the teacher has acquired the relevant planning skills. Many teachers have very successfully demonstrated that this can be achieved, and syndicates and departments which share planning can support the development of differentiated material across all curriculum areas.

At least with regard to curriculum differentiation, *continuity of provision* is also entirely feasible. Indeed, continuity of provision may be at its most secure in the regular classroom if other forms of provision, such as pull-out groups, are dependant on special funding.

Grouping is something New Zealand primary school teachers in particular are very

accustomed to using, though some different factors need to be taken into account here.

Some *intellectual peer interaction* may also be possible, especially where a school is able to cluster five or more gifted students together within the same class.

If all these factors are operating, it seems not unreasonable to conclude that *continuous progress* will also be achievable.

A proviso would be that teachers receive the necessary training in the skills associated with making such provision, preferably in their initial teacher education and supplemented by ongoing professional development.

If this proviso is met, the discussion goes, then surely the regular classroom can indeed provide very satisfactorily for the needs of the gifted learner, and we are justified in regarding this as the major vehicle for such provision. In that case we may quite logically conclude that:

- other forms of provision can have value, but are not essential
- the focus of our attention should be on the regular classroom teacher, and this is where we should invest the bulk of whatever funding and resourcing we allocate to this field.
- if we consider that our teacher education already prepares our teachers well for this approach, then that allocation may not need to be very great.

Examining these conclusions

An argument which seems to be strongly in favour of this approach is the fact that almost all gifted learners in New Zealand spend all, or almost all, of their primary school years in the regular mixed ability classroom, and for many, this will continue at secondary level. It's also true that even where teachers are well informed about identifying gifted learners, not all will be recognised.

Thus, for both these reasons, it would seem logical to say that the regular classroom approach is the best way of ensuring that all gifted learners, identified or not, will have access to differentiated material.

However, positive outcomes within the regular classroom are, first of all, totally dependant on the ability and willingness of the classroom teacher to provide appropriately differentiated material. The evidence on this point is far from encouraging. Renzulli (2005, pp 8-9) reports:

Our research in a nationwide classroom practices study (Archambault et al., 1992) found that classroom teachers made only minor modifications in the regular curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students.

The Classroom Practices Observational Study (Westberg et al., 1992) extended the results of the classroom practices survey by examining the instructional and curricular practices used with gifted and talented students in 46 regular elementary classrooms throughout the United States.

Across five subject areas and 92 subject days, gifted students received instruction in homogeneous groups only 21% of the time and more alarmingly, the targeted gifted and talented or high ability students experienced no instructional or curricular differentiation in 84% of the instructional activities in which they participated.

This study was replicated in Australia, with very similar results (Whitton, 1997), and in 1998, Robinson adapted the original instrument to carry out a Middle School Survey of Classroom Practices, administered to 1008 teachers across the United States. He too found no meaningful differences in curriculum for gifted students. (Cited Westberg & Daoust, 2003).

More recently, Westberg and Daoust decided to replicate the original survey in the United States, this time using a sample of 1366 third and fourth grade teachers. (Westberg and Daoust, 2003). They concluded:

Teachers' differentiation practices in third and fourth grade classrooms have not changed in the last ten years.

... Teachers in the two states selected for this replication have more professional development experiences in gifted education than the teachers across the country reported ten years ago, but this does not appear to be reflected in their classroom practices as reported in this survey.

Commenting on their findings, Westberg and Daoust recommended:

"continued, increased, or different professional development experiences ... if the new understandings about strategies for meeting capable students' needs are to be implemented, teachers need more support and encouragement to apply the training."

They noted the limited impact of brief district inservice courses, and quoted Stephanie Hirsh, Deputy Executive Director of the National Staff Development Council:

"Training without follow-up is malpractice."

They then advocated "job embedded" professional development through the use of measures such as "critical friends" groups, collaborative action research projects, and peer coaching.

Commenting specifically on these kinds of findings, Clark (2002, p. 257) concludes:

As long as the administrative philosophy contends that every teacher can and should be responsible for the learning of every student and has all the knowledge and skills necessary to provide for each child's appropriate educational experiences ... very bright students are at risk.

Thus the research very strongly indicates that to rely *solely* on provision within the classroom is an unsafe practice, even in a country like the United States where gifted education has for years been the subject of extensive research and development.

New Zealand teachers by and large would appear likely to have had even less exposure to professional development in gifted education than teachers in the United States.

We cannot with any semblance of reality allege that all or even the majority of our teachers at any level have all the skills needed to provide adequately for the gifted learner, let alone the understandings on which those skills must be based.

While progress has been made, we have not yet made an adequate commitment to upskilling our teachers to the level required for partial, let alone full, responsibility for meeting the special needs of gifted learners, as the Ministry's own research has made clear:

Schools in New Zealand are cognisant of the need for ongoing schoolwide professional development for all teachers and consider the lack of these opportunities a barrier to identification and provisions. Resources, funding, time and access are reported as barriers to

professional development.

- from "Conclusions of the Research" , in *The Extent, Nature and Effectiveness of Planned Approaches in New Zealand Schools for Providing for Gifted and Talented Students* (Ministry of Education, 2004).

Resolving this problem is a goal which as yet is a very long way away.

Interim conclusion

In these circumstances, it would seem that we would quite simply be irresponsible at the present time to advocate the regular classroom as fully sufficient in itself for all the needs of the gifted learner.

However, it would be *equally* irresponsible to dismiss the role of the regular classroom teacher.

Whatever else we do, the regular classroom teacher must always play **a central role** in the delivery of appropriate learning and developmental opportunities for gifted learners.

We must therefore place a high priority on strengthening the ability of teachers to provide appropriately within the limits of the classroom programme.

What will that require? I would suggest that we need to look urgently at the recommendations made by Westberg and Daoust and consider how they could be implemented in a New Zealand setting.

* We need to ask some significant questions about the professional training and support we currently provide for classroom teachers, and to persist until we get truly satisfactory answers.

* We need to be far more realistic about the level of funding that is required if gifted education nationally is to be more than lip service.

Will this be sufficient?

Let us suppose that all these issues are followed up, and we do reach a situation in which we can say with confidence that our teachers *are* appropriately trained and do have the skills needed to differentiate curriculum material appropriately for gifted learners.

Can we then heave a sigh of relief and rest easy in the certainty that all the needs of gifted learner can now be fully met in the regular classroom?

A key issue

As we have already noted, for most gifted children in New Zealand, particularly at the primary level but not necessarily only at the primary level, being in the regular classroom means being the only gifted child, or one of only two or three, in the class.

The question which must be asked here is whether the child's learning and developmental needs can all be satisfactorily met when he or she has little or no interaction with other children whose minds work in the same way.

How important is this? Does it really make a meaningful difference – or not?

In other words, the key issue here is really whether or not gifted children need to be grouped together in some way for at least some of the time in order for their learning to reach maximum effectiveness.

This is a very real issue for New Zealand, where ability grouping at primary level often involves withdrawal programmes of various kinds and varying lengths *outside* the regular classroom, and where the pros and cons of streaming are still hotly debated at secondary level.

Against grouping

Some writers have argued very strongly that ability grouping is unnecessary, even undesirable.

Firstly, grouping, however it is achieved, has implications for administration and organisation, for resourcing, for personnel and for school and/or parental funding. Even in-class grouping which makes the least demands still requires planning and possibly additional resources. For this to be justified, grouping must be shown to have clearly beneficial effects on children's learning and achievement.

But some research studies have suggested that grouping makes *no* significant difference to learning outcomes.

Another argument against grouping is that it is essentially elitist. Heterogeneous or mixed-ability grouping, on the other hand, is seen as offering a more socially equitable form of provision.

Studies, particularly in the USA, have shown that gifted programmes tend to be dominated by children from socially and economically privileged and predominantly white families, while children from disadvantaged families are left out of consideration. As long ago as 1989, a report for the US Department of Education found that children from low-income families were less than half as likely as their more fortunate fellows to qualify for and participate in gifted programmes. (Clark, 2002, p. 529). If this is an inevitable or even highly probable outcome of ability grouping, then that is certainly going to be unacceptable in the New Zealand context.

Furthermore, it is sometimes argued that by separating gifted children from their age peers, ability grouping even further isolates them, making it even more difficult for those children to be accepted by their age peers and to acquire normal social skills. Since they are going to live as adults in a world populated by the full range of abilities and talents, it is said, they need to be part of that world in order to understand and function within it.

Examining these conclusions

However, claims that ability grouping does not make an effective difference and that it is elitist are roundly dismissed by leading authorities in this field.

The editors of the prestigious *Roepers Review*, for example, straightforwardly describe such claims as "pernicious myths" (September, 2002).

Clark (2002, p. 267) is kinder, acknowledging that they arose from "sincere concerns that some children were not receiving quality educational experiences," but describes it as "a simplistic notion" to claim that the problem will be resolved by removing grouping, while Gross (1997, p. 136) summarises the conclusions of many of her colleagues when she writes, "Unfortunately, much of the criticism [of ability grouping] is polemic, rather than evaluative in nature, and arises from socio-political, rather than educational concerns."

Why are the experts so dismissive? (1) Academic outcomes

How did the experts come to such emphatically expressed conclusions?

The first reason is that the research on which these claims are based has been shown to be inadequately constructed and carried out. (Gross, 1997, Kulik & Kulik, 1997, Rogers, 1993, 2002, Fiedler, Lange & Winebrenner, 1993, 2002).

For example, the studies most frequently cited as demonstrating that ability grouping makes no significant difference are those by Oakes (1985) and Slavin (1987, 1990).

Oakes believed that her study showed that gifted students gained no academic benefit from ability grouping.

However, her study was based on students placed in what is known in the States as an "XYZ"

setting, in which students are grouped into one of three classes according to ability, but all receive the same curriculum with no differentiation. It is scarcely surprising that gifted students in this situation showed little positive gain - there was no opportunity for them to do so. Nevertheless, Oakes forged ahead to assert that these findings could be applied to *all* forms of ability grouping, which should therefore be abandoned.

Slavin carried out "best-evidence" syntheses of the research on ability grouping and also concluded that there were no clear positive gains for gifted students from such grouping.

However, he systematically excluded from his syntheses all data relating specifically to students in the top 5%. *None* of the studies he evaluated to reach this conclusion were studies on students who were gifted. All looked at students of *average* ability. Generalising from such material to make recommendations about gifted students is "highly questionable." (Fiedler, Lange & Winebrenner, 1993, 2002).

Oakes was motivated by her concerns about ensuring adequate educational opportunity for all students regardless of ability, and Slavin felt that he should leave out studies relating to gifted students because gifted programmes involved changes in curriculum and goals which made them fundamentally different from the grouping plans for the general school population which was the principal focus of his study.

These are valid purposes. But both writers were misguided in then trying to use their findings to make recommendations about ability grouping for gifted students. Such an application "clearly is inappropriate." (Allan, cited Gross, 1997, p. 137).

Interestingly and confusingly, both Oakes and Slavin, when they did elsewhere look specifically at gifted students, made statements which appear to *support* ability grouping, Oakes (1986) in relation to her studies of high school students and Slavin (1987) with regard to various forms of grouping relating to specific curriculum areas. But this material is not usually cited by the opponents of ability grouping.

(2) Elitism

Similarly, claims of elitism arise from a genuine desire to recognise and meet the needs of students who may be disadvantaged in current education settings. This too is clearly a valid and desirable goal, whatever the cause or nature of the disadvantage suffered by the student and regardless of where he or she falls in terms of ability.

The studies which indicate that students from more fortunate backgrounds have indeed been disproportionately represented in many gifted programmes have led to a call by some writers, notably Sapon-Shevin (1994), for the disestablishment of gifted programmes on the grounds that they constitute a form of racial or social division.

In what Gross refers to as her "emotively-titled" book, *Playing Favorites: Gifted Education and the Disruption of Community*, Sapon-Shevin (p.135) argues that

"Parental demand for, and the increased interest in, gifted programming can be traced directly to the increasing racial integration of many schools and communities. Gifted programs provide a way to resegregate schools without requiring people to move."

Gross (p. 133) also quotes the New South Wales Teachers' Federation who described gifted high school students seeking early admission to university as

"the Talented Child Brigade who have been pushing their middle-class wheelbarrow all the way to the University ... the sons and daughters of middle-class yuppies trying to steel [sic] more and more privileges under pretensions of greater abilities bestowed on them not by their class position but by God himself."

Looking further

But while, reading this, we might well agree with Ernest Newland that, "Elitism is in the eye of the beholder" (cited Silverman, 2005), it is nevertheless important to take an objective and serious look at the factual foundations for such arguments.

The anecdotal evidence one encounters while moving round schools indicates that the same situation applies in New Zealand too, at least to some extent. We too are apparently likely to have more children from middle and upper income families in our gifted programmes, fewer children from our lower income and from our Maori and Pasifika families. Once again, the Ministry's own research supports this conclusion:

Gifted and talented students from under-represented groups, especially Maori students and those of other ethnic minority groups, are not being readily identified in New Zealand schools, and culturally appropriate provisions are not being planned, implemented or evaluated.
- "Conclusions of the Research", in *The Extent, Nature and Effectiveness of Planned Approaches in New Zealand Schools for Providing for Gifted and Talented Students* (Ministry of Education, 2004).

Why have the programmes which group gifted learners together not more accurately reflected the socio-economic and cultural make-up of our communities?

There would seem to be two main reasons.

Selection process

Firstly, we must look at the process by which students are selected to participate in gifted programmes.

It has been known for many years that a selection process reliant solely on standardised test results will seriously discriminate against children from different cultural or from disadvantaged backgrounds, and also against creative thinkers, gifted underachievers, and gifted children with learning disabilities and other handicaps.

Even if unintentionally, a process which so discriminates is clearly inequitable and unjust.

Therefore a great deal of work internationally has gone into developing fairer and more appropriate procedures to help teachers recognise giftedness, including for example the use of behavioural and developmental indicators as well as performance indicators.

Recommended best practice now is that identification should be a multi-method process, drawing on a range of sources, looking at all relevant aspects of the child's performance, behaviour and development, and taking into account factors specific to the individual and his or her background.

Yet there are many schools in the US and a number in this country too which still use standardised testing as the gate to entry to gifted programmes (in the US, IQ testing; in New Zealand often PATs).

To that extent, Sapon-Shevin has a valid point. Schools which fly in the face of the research evidence in this way, whether because it is easier, less expensive, or for any other reason, are indulging in a discriminatory practice.

That is unacceptable.

Funding

Secondly, we must look at the funding of such programmes.

If entry is available only to those who can afford a fee, then that too is clearly and inevitably socially discriminatory. It is loaded against the gifted student from a low-income family.

To a large extent, such a situation reflects an insidious and often not openly articulated belief that giftedness is somehow associated with affluence.

The New South Wales teachers quoted above obviously thought so, and Clark, writing in the US, comments that,

"A major problem encountered in providing for gifted students among the low-SES population is the attitude - shared by both teachers and parents - that giftedness cannot exist in this population."

New Zealanders are certainly not free of this view. For example, when I was organising a conference on teaching gifted students at secondary level in the year 2000, several South Auckland high schools told us they weren't sending delegates because, they said, "*We're low decile, so we don't have any of those students here.*"

Such an inference is simply not justified. As the personal histories of numerous successful gifted individuals testify, family wealth is not an essential prerequisite for high ability.

When we set up systems which make money the gatekeeper, we create a vicious circle which perpetuates this unfortunate myth, huge amounts of potential are lost, and individual children are denied access to learning opportunities essential to their development and to their happiness at school.

This should be totally unacceptable in a country which asserts its commitment to equity of opportunity.

Yet that is exactly the current situation in New Zealand. Limited-term funding can be accessed by a limited number of schools through the contestable funding pool, but there is currently no permanent ongoing funding for gifted programmes.

Schools who wish to use ability groups to complement their in-class provision must therefore either divert funds from other areas of need, divert energy and time into fund-raising for this purpose, run inadequately-resourced programmes, or make participation dependant on payment of a fee which can then be used to meet the essential costs of such a programme.

It is scarcely a national secret that both fund-raising and seeking fees for specific activities can be much more easily accomplished in high decile schools, so this situation further disadvantages the gifted child from a low-income family and in a low-decile school.

Thus, contrary to our own declared national philosophy, access to gifted programmes outside the classroom or involving any special resources or personnel is often an optional extra available to those with money.

That is an issue which needs *urgently* to be addressed.

Doesn't this invalidate ability grouping?

The research may be unsound and some of the writing highly emotive, but if it is nonetheless true that both commonly used selection processes and the funding of gifted education programmes do discriminate unfairly against some students, then doesn't that clearly show that ability grouping is, as its opponents have claimed, an undesirable process, incompatible with the aims and philosophy of the New Zealand education system?

No.

We most certainly do need to recognise and address these issues.

But they are issues relating to *access* to ability grouping.

They are not about ability grouping itself.

In their excellent article on this very subject, Fiedler, Lange and Winebrenner neatly summed it up: "Eliminating ability grouping because of inequitable identification procedures is tantamount to throwing out the baby with the bath water."

Where does this leave us?

Where exactly does all this leave us? Those opposed to grouping believe that the individual needs of the gifted child can be adequately met in the regular classroom, and that ability grouping which involves going outside the classroom is neither necessary nor effective.

Some also believe it is inherently elitist.

However, the research which purports to show that ability grouping is not effective does not stand up, and while we certainly must do much more to ensure *all* schools use equitable identification procedures, claims that ability grouping itself is elitist cannot be substantiated.

However, before we can commit to change, we must first ask, is there any research which *is* credible which has examined whether or not ability grouping *is* effective?

Fortunately, there is.

In 1993, because of the debate surrounding this issue generated by claims such as those reported above, noted researcher Karen B. Rogers undertook a careful analysis of the various research approaches used to study ability grouping and identified those approaches which could yield reliable information. ("Grouping the Gifted and Talented: Questions and Answers", *Roepers Review*, 16/1, 1993).

Her work has provided us with a benchmark for evaluating research reports on this topic. Recognising its continuing significance, the editors of *Roepers Review* republished this paper in their September 2002 issue, commenting on the "methodologically rigorous manner" in which she had gone about this "daunting but important task", and concluding that, on an issue where heat had tended to prevail over light,

"her conclusions are clearly based on scholarly analysis rather than personal ideology, and, as a result, they provide a useful basis for decision-making and policy."

What this research shows

Rogers herself summarised the findings of a considerable number of studies which met the criteria she had identified.

She drew attention to three points which educators of the gifted need to take into account:

- ✍ the need to ensure that socialisation concerns such as those raised by Oakes are addressed,
- ✍ the need to be aware that individual variations between schools in factors such as school organisation and culture, personnel and population demographics can affect the success of a programme option, and
- ✍ the need to ensure that grouping is utilised to provide genuinely differentiated learning opportunities.

Taking all these factors into consideration, Rogers described the range of grouping options that had been studied and the degree of support each had received.

She found that the studies showed *differing but significant* academic gains for every form of ability grouping, with the sole exception of cooperative learning grouping when used in a mixed-ability setting. She summarised her findings thus:

Gifted learners need some form of grouping by ability to effectively and efficiently accomplish several educational goals, including appropriately broadened, extended and accelerated curricula.

They must be in groups so that their school curriculum may be appropriately broadened and extended.

The pacing of instruction, the depth of content, and advancement in knowledge fields, which these students must have, cannot be effectively facilitated without a variety of ability-grouped arrangements."

She concluded simply, "One size does not fit all."

Examining this research

Perhaps the most-quoted studies of those which meet Roger's criteria are those by Kulik and Kulik, who across a decade from the late 80's onwards carried out several meta-analyses of numerous well-conducted research studies looking at ability grouping.

Oakes had charged that ability grouping was discriminatory, unfair and ineffective. She had alleged that children gained nothing from placement in homogeneous classes and further, that children in slower groups were harmed both intellectually and psychologically by grouping.

Kulik and Kulik, looking at these very worrying claims, understandably decided that "Educators need to know whether the research actually supports such charges." (1992).

They found no such support. On the contrary, they concluded that exactly the opposite was true.

The studies they evaluated showed clear positive gains when gifted learners were ability-grouped and provided with an appropriately differentiated curriculum, up to an effect size of .87 (.30 is considered significant), and furthermore, they found that lower-ability students may actually *gain* slightly in self-esteem when taught with other slower learners.

Thus they concluded that schools (and children) would in fact be *harmed* by the elimination of grouping.

Another highly regarded meta-analysis was that carried out by Vaughan, Feldhusen and Asher (1991), which found that the studies they examined also showed significant gains in achievement and thinking skills for gifted students enrolled in pull-out programmes.

Commenting on these and similar findings, Feldhusen and Moon (1992) pointed to studies (eg Griggs & Price, 1980, Sicola, 1990) showing the very real differences in learning style exhibited by gifted students in comparison with the non-gifted students:

[Gifted learners] need instruction that is conceptually more complex and abstract than most learners can handle. Gifted students learn better in unstructured environments and benefit from indirect teaching methods. Less able learners, on the other hand, tend to do better with structured learning environments and direct, structured instruction.

Looking at these findings in the light of Oakes's call for "a major social reorganisation ... to help equalise the effects of schooling", they concluded that opposition to ability grouping stems from an attempt

to create justice by equal treatment of unequals. We believe this approach is inherently unjust to the most and least able. Justice is achieved not by equality of treatment, but by *equality of opportunity*.

Fiedler, Lange and Winebrenner (1993) looked not only at studies showing academic gains for gifted students when allowed to work together through ability grouping, but also at some of the other effects of such grouping.

They examined the most common myths about ability grouping, and found every single one of them to have been *disproven* by research.

They cited studies which showed that:

- ✍ when gifted students were away from the regular classroom, new leadership emerged and *more* children experienced success;
- ✍ that elitist attitudes were *more*, not less, likely to emerge when the gifted student was isolated from ability peers and had little or no opportunity to experience failure or real challenge;
- ✍ that gifted students do *not* "make it on their own" but need cognitive and affective interaction with other gifted students;
- ✍ that without such interaction, gifted students may fail to learn how to learn and have problems developing study skills; and
- ✍ that the notion that gifted students act as role models for the non-gifted is based on highly questionable assumptions and can have detrimental effects for both gifted and non-gifted students.

They conclude:

Education in a free society should not boil down to a choice between equity and excellence. Providing for formerly disenfranchised groups need not take away appropriate programs from any other group. As the research indicates, gifted students clearly benefit from working together. Therefore, it is imperative that ability grouping be continued.

This paper too was also re-published in the September 2002 issue of *Roepers Review*, with the editors commenting, "Reasoned analyses such as this one go a long way toward cutting through some of the rhetoric and confusion ... about what constitutes the need for differentiated educational provisions."

Looking both at this article and that by Rogers, they concluded that,

"schools that fail to provide some form of ability grouping are in a position that will be difficult to defend."

Clark (2002, p.268) also notes that not only achievement is affected when gifted students are kept in heterogeneous or mixed ability classes. So too are other vitally important aspects of the child's development and learning. Material from many sources demonstrates this. Clark herself cited Feldhusen and Moon's finding of poorer attitudes and lowered motivation. Some other examples:

✍ A 1998 report from OFSTED (the UK's Office for Standards in Education), commenting on the findings of both British and American studies looking at boredom as a frequently nominated issue for gifted learners in regular classrooms, concluded that boredom "can become a demoralising and maladaptive habit leading to disenchantment with learning."

✍ Alice Ho's study of New Zealand gifted children found that gifted children without ability peers made significant changes in their learning behaviour and classroom responses in order to fit in with the majority (Ho, 2002).

✍ There is a huge international literature on "dumbing down" by gifted females to achieve the same end.

Clark (p. 269) also quotes a study by J. Evans which had looked at the impact on "less-achieving" students when gifted students were in the same classroom:

- ✍ The less-achieving students experienced more difficulty because of the pressure from the higher pacing and higher thought processes of the more advanced students.
- ✍ The less-achieving students exhibited more difficult behaviour.
- ✍ Teachers experienced management problems.
- ✍ Some children showed a return to failure situations which had previously been remediated by grouping.

Renzulli too in his most recent work writes about equity:

We believe that true equity can only be achieved when we acknowledge individual differences in the students we serve, and when we recognise that high-achieving students have as much right to accommodations in their schooling as do students who are experiencing learning difficulties.

We also believe that equity is not the product of identical learning experiences for all students; rather, it is the product of a broad range of differentiated experiences that take into account each student's unique strengths. (Renzulli, 2005, p.25).

Similarly, Winner (1997) suggests that,

"schools cannot be truly egalitarian *unless* they acknowledge learning differences, including those differences possessed by students of high ability." (Italics added).

She too quotes a large number of studies examining the many significant differences in the way a gifted child experiences life and learning compared with a non-gifted child, including:

- ✍ rate of development
- ✍ attitudes towards learning and towards accomplishment
- ✍ learning style
- ✍ emotional intensity
- ✍ independence, and
- ✍ the development of self esteem,

and asks how these can be catered for without such acknowledgement. She writes about

our deep-seated ambivalence about intellectual giftedness, arising from an anti-intellectual strain in our culture, and a variety of anti-elitism that is reserved for intellectual ability (since we promote elitism for the athletic, famous, rich and beautiful)

adding that this is

based on an egalitarian interpretation of democracy that holds that everyone should be treated in the same way. But the belief that all should be treated in the same way is just one way of interpreting the democratic ideal. An approach based on another interpretation is that [in a democracy] each individual should be helped to fulfil his or her potential.

Numerous writers have similarly commented on the odd, illogical and unjust disparity of our treatment of different areas of giftedness, one significant aspect of which is our disinclination to value those whose giftedness lies in their perceptiveness about society itself and the values which dominate our actions and behaviour.

As long ago as 1975, noted New Zealand scholar George Parkyn was warning of the shortsightedness of this approach:

The way ahead, if humanity stays on its present course, is catastrophic. ... Our recent confrontation with some of the more harmful results of man's treatment of 'space-ship earth' is making us pay more heed to what has long been said by our wisest spirits: that we must treasure other gifts than rational-scientific thinking. ... Our very survival depends upon a new concern with the quality of human life in its relationship to the finite world we inhabit. (Parkyn in Parkyn, 1995, pp 5-6).

And today, Renzulli, regarded by many as the world's leading researcher in this field, is making a very similar plea for us to recognise and support those whose abilities render them potentially capable, not only of raising the level of our national affluence, but of

bringing about changes that are directed toward making the lives of all people better ... making the lives of all people more personally rewarding, environmentally safe, peaceful, and politically free. (Renzulli, 2002, p. 5).

Meanwhile research continues. Summarising various research studies from those of the Kuliks back in the 1990's through to more recent work (Schuler, 1997, Loveless, 1998, Gentry and Owen, 1999, Rogers, 2001), Clark (2002, pp. 269-70) reports positive findings on ability grouping, including:

- ✍ Significant academic gains result when programmes are adjusted to student abilities.
- ✍ Positive development in self concept and a sense of well-being result.
- ✍ The amount of time spent in special groups or classes relates positively to achievement gains.
- ✍ There is more opportunity for individual expression, in-depth study, acceleration, and freedom from regimentation in ability-grouped classes.
- ✍ More learning takes place.
- ✍ More trusting relationships are established, allowing students to spend their time and energy in learning, rather than in disruptive behaviours.

Thus the gains from employing ability grouping include, but also go beyond, academic achievement to impact on important areas of the student's whole development as a human being.

And in a recently released major study involving around 28,000 highly able secondary pupils in the UK, Professor David Jesson of York University has found a distinct association

between the number of very able pupils in a school's year cohort and their subsequent levels of achievement:

Those who attended non-selective, comprehensive schools where there were "clusters" of twenty or more able students went on to achieve seven or more grade As at GCSE, while those who were relatively isolated amongst comparatively less able pupils achieved barely half as many. Interestingly however these able students in non-selective secondary schools outperformed those who were educated in selective "grammar" schools. The Times editorial commenting on these draft findings made the point that able students appeared to benefit in the dual context of reasonable numbers of other highly able pupils but within the genuinely comprehensive environment of non-selective education. The evidence offered no support for selective education as such. (Personal communication, David Jesson, 1.7.05).

According to Jesson, "part of the concerns giving rise to the original work were the over-representation of pupils from private schools in accessing the more prestigious universities"; hence the reference to "selective" versus "non-selective" education, relevant for New Zealand where only a small minority of children attend the equivalent of "selective" schools. Jesson reports that the UK Government has decided to use the frameworks developed in this research, though because of the original concerns, the 'identification' process will apply only to pupils in state schools. These are being implemented in 2006 by the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth with "a slight refinement of dealing separately with boys and girls and also taking account of the term of birth." (Personal communication, David Jesson, 19.6.06).

INTERIM SUMMARY

Thus for almost twenty years now, research has consistently found that gifted students benefit significantly, both cognitively and affectively, from being together for at least part of the time, and that, far from harming other students, there can be positive gains for all.

It seems clear that we now have to accept that, however it is achieved, some opportunity for interaction with ability peers is an essential component of meeting the needs of the gifted learner.

Grouping, plus ...?

We are left with three questions.

Firstly, can we assume that as long as we manage to provide the time for gifted students to come together, this will automatically create an ideal learning experience for these students?

Secondly, how can such grouping be achieved? Can we do this effectively *within* the regular mixed ability classroom, or must we also provide special groups or classes?

Finally, how does all this relate to the concept of the *inclusive* classroom?

The first question

Is bringing students together sufficient in itself?

Common sense and research go hand in hand here to confirm that this is clearly *not* the case.

Grouping is the essential *first step*. It creates an *opportunity* for effective differentiation of curriculum and instruction to take place. It sets up a context in which it is *possible* for gifted students to work continuously and intensively at a higher level and at a faster pace, to grapple with challenging conceptual material without distraction, and to express freely the ideas and questions that surge into their minds and imaginations.

Actually *providing* that differentiation is the essential *next* step.

Kulik and Kulik (1992) expressed the generally accepted conclusion when they wrote,

"the key factor is the degree to which course content is adjusted to group ability."

Not entirely unexpectedly, they have repeatedly found that when gifted students are grouped together but given the same curriculum as other non-gifted students, with material presented at the same level, pace and depth, the benefits are minimal, but that where ability grouping is specifically designed for gifted students *and* offers a curriculum matched to the learning characteristics of the gifted, there are strongly positive effects.

Clark (2002, p. 266), looking at this and the other accumulated research, endorses this:

Grouping in and of itself is insufficient to have significant effects on achievement. The curriculum content and processes also must change to become more appropriate to gifted learners.

Thinking about the teacher

The provision of such differentiated material, wherever or however it is to be delivered, always has implications for the teacher.

We have already noted earlier, in discussing the Classroom Practices Survey, the crucial role of the regular classroom teacher and therefore the urgent need to provide better training for the regular classroom teacher in developing and delivering such material. This need cannot be emphasised too strongly.

The expert practitioner

There is also what I would argue is a largely unrecognised need for *expert practitioners* who can both develop special programmes or special classes for the gifted, and provide guidance and leadership for the regular classroom teacher.

Who are these teachers? If we refer back to Clark's essential criteria for successful gifted programming, we see that she includes "teachers with specialised education for this population."

This includes, but goes beyond, a high level of theoretical knowledge and of practical skills.

It implies also a range of personal qualities, variously defined in different studies, but including factors such as:

- ✍ being inherently democratic rather than autocratic or didactic,
- ✍ being intellectually competent and interested,
- ✍ being innovative and experimental rather than conformist, but also committed to excellence,
- ✍ offering trust and respect to others including children,
- ✍ being flexible,
- ✍ being enthusiastic about learning, discovery and understanding,
- ✍ having a sense of humour,
- ✍ valuing and being able to nurture creativity,
- ✍ and so on.

(Clark, 2002, pp 220 – 224, provides an interesting summary of research in this field).

We need to do much more to acknowledge that there is a place for such expert practitioners within our education system, not only as advisors, but also directly involved in the development and delivery of gifted programmes in our schools.

We need to know better than we do now how to recognise them and how to tap into their expertise.

We need to strengthen the liaison between such practitioners and policy-makers, teacher trainers and researchers.

I applaud the intention of the Ministry to set up a national teachers' network which may bring us closer to realising this aim.

Meanwhile, for the purposes of this paper, we shall assume in the following discussion that these needs have been recognised and met and that teachers have been given the opportunity to acquire skill in differentiating material for gifted learners and that grouping, however it occurs, is indeed followed by the provision of appropriately differentiated material. The second question then follows.

The second question...

How can grouping be achieved?

Grouping in the regular classroom

The first possibility to consider is whether this need can be adequately met by within-class grouping, or to what extent it can be met and whether supplementary grouping is required.

Research has clearly shown that within-class grouping does have positive outcomes.

Kulik and Kulik (1992) found that it did produce "small positive effects" for gifted learners.

Slavin's best-evidence synthesis reported substantial gains for all learners when students were ability-grouped within the regular classroom for maths. (Slavin, 1987).

Reviewing the research, Rogers (1993) also felt that within-class grouping could be beneficial. Thus where schools have gifted learners at about the same age level, best practice is certainly to cluster them in one class. The practice of "studding" them one to each class is *not* to be recommended, isolating them as it does from any possibility of peer interaction.

However, as Rogers also pointed out, these beneficial effects are very dependant on numbers.

Cluster grouping - the practice of ensuring all the gifted learners at a specific age level are placed in the same class - or even flexible grouping - where gifted learners come together for specific periods of time or for specific purposes - both require a group size of at least five to eight students to be fully effective.

Furthermore, a group within a class is still constrained to some extent by the needs and expectations of other members of that class.

It may not be possible, for example, for your Year 3 gifted group, working in the regular classroom alongside other children of varied levels of ability and with other and varied needs, to hold an animated two-hour debate on the meaning of infinity or to use the entire whiteboard to develop diagrammatic representations of different systems for classifying animals.

Both physically and psychologically, gifted students can be inhibited by the presence of others whose learning processes are very different from their own.

Alice Ho's study was a first-class piece of New Zealand research which examined exactly this. She found huge differences between the behaviour of gifted children when they were in their regular classroom environment and their behaviour when they were in a specialist gifted programme.

She found that:

✍ in the gifted setting, these young gifted learners talked with each other and with their teacher *two and a half times more often* than they did in the regular classroom setting,

☞ in the gifted setting their discussions were about their *learning* whereas in the regular classroom setting their discussions were *social*,
☞ the children themselves were aware of these differences and of the adaptations they made in the different settings.

Significantly, neither Ho nor the children she studied dismissed the value of their involvement in the regular classroom. The children she selected were children who in fact were quite happy at school. But clearly they were gaining something from their interaction with ability peers that they did not experience in the regular classroom setting.

In short, within-class grouping is a viable option, should certainly be *part* of provision wherever it is physically possible, but is *not* a *total* answer.

In other words - wouldn't you just know it! - there is no "one right answer" here!

What other options are there?

Researchers have looked at a whole range of possibilities.

They include fulltime classes, cluster grouping, pull-out programmes, vertical grouping, and "re-grouping" for one or two subjects.

Other programme options for gifted learners which in effect result in their being differently grouped include early entry programmes, dual enrolment, and various forms of acceleration, and of course nowadays we should also include gifted groups working in online programmes, such as the GO programme here in New Zealand or Renzulli's new programme based on the enrichment triad.

All (except online programmes which don't seem yet to have been researched) have been found to have positive effects, but the degree of effect ranges considerably, from .29 for Advanced Placement (university-level courses and exams available at secondary level), just below the .30 significance threshold (Rogers, 1993), through to .87 for accelerated classes (Kulik and Kulik, 1992).

☞ Deciding which options are appropriate for a particular school will involve a careful evaluation of that school's individual situation. The crucial point is that a way *is* found that is the best available in the circumstances.

However, for the purposes of this paper, I would like to take a slightly more detailed look at one particular form of grouping which has been the subject of some criticism but which, I would suggest, is actually a most valuable tool for supplementing and supporting in-class provision.

Pullout groups

Pullout or withdrawal groups are used when there are not sufficient children in the class to create a viable group for instructional purposes.

Children who participate in such groups may come from several different classrooms or even from several schools within a district and may be drawn from more than one year-group. They come out of their home classroom and move to a common venue where they are able to work together at an advanced pace and level.

Pull-out groups vary in time and duration.

They may last from just an hour a week to a full day a week, and they may be for very short periods - sometimes, for example, as a one-off "intensive" for just a few days - or for much longer, even indefinitely.

They may focus on a specific curriculum area, or they may take a thematic approach to content. They are most commonly perceived as providing "enrichment", although that is by no means always a true description.

Examining the criticisms of pull-out groups

Valid criticism of such groups can certainly be made when the learning opportunities they provide are not adequately differentiated.

Just as in the regular classroom, this can happen when the teacher taking the group does not have the necessary skills or knowledge to develop such a programme, or when school policy is inappropriate or uninformed.

For example, I have come across instances of so-called gifted programmes where every single child in the school "has a turn", thus magnificently defeating the objective.

Programmes can be too short or too infrequent to be effective, and children participating can suffer if teachers make them catch up on all the work they have missed, especially where that is material they actually already know, or when teachers assume that as they're in a programme, nothing needs to happen in the classroom.

However, just as earlier we saw that inadequate assessment procedures do not invalidate ability grouping itself, so too inadequate implementation in some instances does not invalidate the actual concept of pullout programmes.

On the contrary:

- ✍ The meta-analysis carried out by Vaughan, Feldhusen and Asher (1991) showed significant gains in achievement and thinking skills in gifted children enrolled in pullout enrichment groups.
- ✍ Kulik and Kulik, on the basis of their meta-analysis, found that enriched and accelerated groups produced moderate to large gains (compared with small gains for within-class and cross-grade grouping).
- ✍ Feldhusen and Moon (1992) reported that a retrospective study of students who had been enrolled in such a group in elementary school found substantial *long-term* benefits had accrued.
- ✍ Renzulli's famed Enrichment Triad, one of the world's best-known and most frequently used gifted programme models, requires the use of pull-out time for Level III of its implementation.

In short, the belief that pullout programmes do not work simply cannot be substantiated. Exactly the reverse is true.

Why do they work?

When we look at the criteria listed by Clark for effective gifted programmes

- differentiation, flexible grouping, continuous progress, intellectual peer interaction, continuity, and teachers with specialised education -

we begin to see why it is that pullout programmes, properly constructed and implemented, can be such a valuable part of successful provision for gifted children.

- ✍ As with all forms of grouping, they create the opportunity for *sustained and intensive differentiation* and for *ability peer interaction*.
- ✍ They allow us to make the most effective use of that still scarce resource, *the teacher with specialised training* in this field, and they enable such teachers to build a hugely valuable *depth of experience*, which in turn enables them to provide *guidance and support* for colleagues working in the regular classroom.
- ✍ Adequately funded, they can provide *continuity of provision and progress* for the gifted learner, helping to overcome the varied experiences these children so often have from year to

year with their classroom teachers having differing levels of understanding and skill in this field.

In the New Zealand context, given our relatively small average school size, especially at primary level, and our very limited access to real expertise and depth of experience in this field, these are all highly valuable attributes.

Once again, instead of judging the concept by those who implement it inadequately, we must look at those programmes which are functioning at a high quality level, ensure we provide appropriate support for their continuation, and work to lift all other such programmes to the same level.

And yet again, this means we must do much, much more in terms of professional development and ongoing support for research, teacher education and programme development in this field.

THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

At the beginning of this paper, I said that I would start by looking at the gifted learner in the regular classroom, but that finally I would come to the concept of the gifted learner in the *inclusive* classroom, and I want to do that now.

I noted that across many years of working in gifted education throughout New Zealand, I had repeatedly come across the view that New Zealand classroom teachers could adequately meet *all* the needs of *every* individual child, no matter how diverse and different these might be. I reported that this belief was quite often used as a reason for declining permission for gifted children to enrol in specialist gifted programmes. Furthermore I reported that my own experience had been that this response was sometimes supported by the assertion that this meant the school was being “inclusive”.

The research on which these beliefs are based has been shown to be unsound. It is absolutely unwise and unsafe for us to commit the welfare of a whole generation of our most able children to a system based on such inaccuracies.

Extensive and authoritative research over the past two decades has found exactly the opposite of what has been claimed. To meet the needs of our gifted learners fully effectively, we need a *continuum* of services, including provision for appropriate grouping. That is to say, acknowledging the diversity of gifted learners as a group and the typically asynchronous development of the gifted learner as an individual, provision must be both flexible and comprehensive, with access to different types of services as these are needed. There is no one set formula that will cope with the varied needs of gifted learners.

Those who ignore or dismiss these research findings and insist that all the needs of gifted learners can be fully and satisfactorily met within the regular classroom do gifted children - and indeed their teachers and the other children with whom they share a classroom - a huge disservice. Those who make this claim in the belief that this is what is meant by an inclusive classroom do the concept of the inclusive classroom an equally huge disservice.

The “exclusive” classroom

The notion that the regular classroom teacher should be able to satisfy the needs of all learners without resort to any outside support is very directly at odds with practices built into our education system and highly valued by the New Zealand community.

Every remedial reading teacher and every RTLB in New Zealand is an individual manifestation of our recognition that teachers cannot do it all by themselves.

Every referral to a school counsellor makes exactly the same point.

The existence of "work experience" classes in our high schools is a systemic acknowledgement of the need to cater outside the regular classroom for some different learning needs.

Every time a child is released from class to train for a specific activity, whether it's the interschool athletics competition or the upcoming school choral performance, the sheer impossibility of the classroom teacher being able to meet all individual needs is demonstrated all over again.

Hundreds of times every single day of the week in classrooms throughout New Zealand, the notion of a hermetically sealed exclusive classroom refusing entry to all but the classroom teacher is well and truly honoured in the breach.

Yet no-one suggests that remedial reading teachers, RTLBs, school counsellors, work experience teachers, sports coaches, music tutors, or any of the other specialist personnel schools employ should be summarily removed from our education system.

So why should such specialist support be denied to gifted children?

Perhaps it is time to look honestly at our attitudes and values as a nation.

It has been said over and over again, but perhaps it is worth once more drawing attention to the high level of provision for those who are gifted in the sporting field as opposed to those who are intellectually and creatively gifted.

We give countless millions of dollars to those who are gifted in sport. Millions even to a single sport, on occasion, as we saw with the America's Cup, which we lost.

But across the whole country, we give only the barest minimum to those who are gifted in thinking, reasoning, imagining and creating in a huge range of fields, just the tiniest fraction of what we give to sporting achievers.

This difference of treatment is neither logically nor morally defensible.

It cannot be argued on economic grounds by claiming that sport generates vast revenues for the country.

Those whose giftedness is in their minds rather than in their feet are the very people who have the potential to contribute most to our science, industry and trade, and to do so *throughout* their lives, not just for a few years in their youth.

Our continued failure to provide adequately for our most able young citizens is comprehensible only in terms of cultural beliefs within New Zealand society which are clearly in urgent need of revision.

The misuse of the inclusive classroom concept

It is therefore a matter of very great concern, I suggest, that some schools robustly endeavour to justify their use of this approach by saying that this means they have "inclusive classrooms".

This must be challenged. It is a total misunderstanding and the exact opposite of what is actually intended by the proponents of inclusive classrooms.

So what is an inclusive classroom really meant to be?

Let's look at a definition recently quoted to me as one that is generally accepted by writers and researchers interested in this field:

Inclusion is about the education of all students in the mainstream. It also means that all students are provided with appropriate educational opportunities within the mainstream **that are challenging yet geared to their capabilities and needs.**

They are likewise provided with any support or assistance they or their teachers may need to be successful in the mainstream.

An inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met. (Stainback & Stainback, 1986).

It would appear that those who claim that the ideal of an inclusive classroom is to be achieved by asserting that the individual classroom teacher can cater alone for the needs of every individual child have read only the first two sentences of this definition.

Even this, however, as we have seen, is contingent upon that individual teacher having the understanding of the needs of each child, and the knowledge, skill and time needed to develop and implement a full range of appropriate learning opportunities.

But what is being overlooked is that the rest of the definition does NOT say the teacher must operate alone.

On the contrary, it specifically states that support and assistance is to be provided to teacher and child by the whole school community. Access to specialist teachers and resources is meant to be *an integral part* of true inclusion. That's *why* it's called "inclusive"!!!

An adapted definition of "inclusive"

It seems to me that we have run into this difficulty with the notion of an inclusive classroom because the concept is not in fact properly understood, and furthermore, that the opening sentences of this definition *allow for* that misunderstanding.

Therefore we need to re-word this definition so that its intentions cannot be so misapprehended, either in relation to gifted learners or indeed to any learners.

But looking specifically at the gifted, the ideas I have put forward for your consideration today are not about an "either/or" approach.

It can never be justifiable to say that there is just one solution to meeting the needs of gifted learners.

Just as research has shown us that we should not rely solely on in-class provision, so too has it shown us that we should not rely solely on supplementary provisions or on *any one* form of such provision.

At the risk of repeating myself, let me emphasise the fact that gifted learners are an intrinsically diverse group, with widely differing areas of ability and encompassing a wider range of levels of ability than is found in any other group.

To do them justice, we do indeed need that continuum of services that Clark, Renzulli and others have so powerfully described.

That means we must be able to call on all the resources essential to that task, including specialist personnel with skills outside of but complementing those of the classroom teacher, and family members with personal knowledge of the child outside of but complementing that of the classroom teacher.

I therefore suggest that we focus more clearly on that part of the definition which discusses access to such support as an integral part of an inclusive approach.

Thus my adapted definition would read:

An *inclusive classroom* is one in which *all* who teach, care for, and care about the child work together in an *inclusive partnership*, able to contribute their expertise and knowledge as and when it is needed, to guide and support the child's development.

An *inclusive school* is one which extends this partnership so that it becomes a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met.

Every child should have the right to be educated in an inclusive classroom in an inclusive school.

If we can achieve this, then the child's needs can be met without false and unnecessary barriers to prevent cooperation or deny services

And for such a classroom to be possible, I suggest to you that we need to advocate, through the network being formed at this conference and through every other available avenue, for the adequate provision of those resources which will make this possible, including:

✍ Providing continuing support for quality professional development in this field for all teachers.

✍ Ensuring resource personnel including RTLB, school counsellors and psychologists receive appropriate initial training and ongoing professional development in this field.

✍ Recognising the role of the expert practitioner, assisting schools to access expert practitioners, supporting their work.

✍ Providing far more adequate funding to ensure schools have access to all these resources.

✍ Ensuring ERO officers receive appropriate professional development in this field.

But beyond this, I want to ask everyone here to go back to your particular educational setting and to ask yourselves this question:

How well does this partnership concept operate where I teach?

Some of you will find it is already there and working very effectively. Some of you will find that it operates for some groups of children but not all, and that those for whom it doesn't work are often those who have different needs in some way. Some of you - quite a few of you, I suspect - will find that for gifted learners, it is there in promise but not in practice. Some of you will find it is not there at all.

We need to ask ourselves, what are the barriers to being genuinely inclusive? Or perhaps, what are the genuine barriers to being inclusive?

Some of those barriers arise from context and circumstances. It is clearly much more difficult at high school, for instance, for every teacher to relate beyond a superficial level with every student's family. Do we therefore have to give up? Or can we find sensible and workable ways to interact with families and to access and share the valuable information families have?

But I think we must recognise that most of the barriers come from our own attitudes and

assumptions as a profession, our lack of knowledge about gifted learners and their needs, often our unawareness of our own lack of knowledge, sometimes our reluctance to admit that lack of knowledge.

It's my hope that everyone here will go away from this conference committed to encouraging a partnership approach in which we are open to input from colleagues who know the child we teach, from expert practitioners both inside and outside school who have specialist skills to offer, from parents because their insights are different from ours and can enhance ours, and from the children themselves.

I believe this to be an approach which will enable us to reach the goal of equitable provision, not just for gifted children, but for all children.

Then the rising tide will indeed lift all vessels.

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