

Parent-Teacher Partnership for Gifted Early Readers in New Zealand.

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The experiences of gifted preschool readers and their parents are discussed in this paper, with data obtained through extended parent interviews of 11 four-year-old children in New Zealand (Margrain, 2005). In addition to sharing the experiences of these parents, common misconceptions are reported, and the positive role that parents play in supporting their children highlighted. Findings indicate that the parents were able to identify their children's strengths and talents, acted as advocates to support their children, were responsive, and provided the key resource of time. These findings negate commonly held assumptions that the parents of gifted children are overtly 'pushy' or 'hothousing'. Instead, this paper argues that teachers can learn a lot from parents and they need to work together to plan for positive outcomes for young gifted children.

Keywords: Parent teacher partnership, parents, gifted children, early years education, precocious readers; advocacy

Introduction.

Precocious readers are a particular group of young gifted learners, constituting around one to two and a half per cent of the population (Jackson, Donaldson & Cleland, 1988). Stainthorp and Hughes (2004) define precocious readers as "children who are able to read fluently and with understanding at an unusually young age before attending school and without having received any direct instruction in reading" (p. 107). Literature on precocious readers consistently notes that the children play an active role in initiating and extending their own literacy learning (Anbar, 1986; Clark, 1982; Teale & Jeffries, 1982). Precocious readers provide an important case study of young gifted children because of their self-motivation and because they are self-taught (Jackson & Roller, 1993).

An egalitarian approach and 'tall poppy' syndrome has negatively impacted on identification of and support for gifted and talented children (Moltzen, 1996; Porter, 2005). This means that pedagogical responsiveness has been limited in terms of identifying or catering for giftedness due to the risk that such responses are perceived as elitist. Within the field of gifted education, the youngest learners may be less likely to be identified and accommodated within education, and the role of parents is often misunderstood. In New Zealand there is no government funding or programmes to support gifted children in early childhood, and gifted children may not start school earlier than other children do.

One of the research aims of my 2005 doctoral study (Margrain, 2005) was to explore the roles of parents of precocious readers: how did they support their children's ability, and how did teachers view and value parents?

In this paper, evidence is provided of roles enacted by parents, and consideration is given to the extent to which these roles were supportive for the children.

Because parents are young children's 'first teachers' it is important that teachers understand

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their input. Furthermore, because there are limited professional development opportunities or other supports available to teachers in early childhood or the early years of primary school, often parents become the 'experts' (Webb, 1982). If teachers of young children are to recognize and value giftedness, then working with parents is crucial (Porter, 2008).

Methodology.

Recruitment

Children were recruited as a result of personal contacts within the early childhood education sector or from flyers. The flyers, inviting contact from people who "know of a preschooler who is able to read", were sent to local early childhood services, kindergarten and playcenter associations, and home based early childhood education networks (Margrain, 2005, Appendix A). It was estimated that the services approached had 3,500 three to four-year-old children on their combined rolls. Flyers were also left at public libraries inviting contact. From the recruitment processes, 15 four-year-old children were nominated by either parents or teachers, and all were assessed by the researcher as having reading accuracy levels beyond six years using the *Neale Analysis of Reading* (Neale, 1999). Eleven children with reading accuracy levels close to or beyond the age of seven years were invited to participate in the full study; these 11 children, their parents, and teachers all agreed to participate.

Participants

Four of the children were girls, and seven were boys. All families included both father and mother. In all of the families an adult was 'at home' in order to provide childcare support the majority of the time. For example, one mother worked on Saturdays only so that either she or her husband were always available for the children. In nine of the families this was the mother, who was at home full time, or working part-time with flexible hours. According to New Zealand census statistics (2006), only 19% of mothers of a child under the age of 5 years old work 30 hours per week or more. For two of the families, grandparents provided full-time childcare support to the parents, even though the children attended part-time childcare. Educational levels are not specifically reported in the study; however several of them anecdotally referred to tertiary

qualifications. The mothers discounted their own qualifications because they saw their role as being 'at home' parents; for example, a former teacher worked part-time in a bookshop but saw neither of these occupations as representing her professional identity, which was 'mother'. Of the fathers, five were in business/managerial roles, four were in professional roles, one was in manual work, and one was retired.

The overall socioeconomic status of families was middleclass; although many of the fathers were in professional or managerial roles, the family choice of having mothers 'at home' lowered the overall family income. Four of the families identified as Asian, and seven families identified as European New Zealanders. The families were recruited within the greater region of a cluster of New Zealand cities in one geographic region; the population of the region was less than 400,000. All of the families lived in houses situated in outlying suburbs; close to schools, neighborhood shops and public transport.

At the time of data collection, in three of the eleven families, the children had no siblings. Of the remaining eight children, four were the eldest of two children, three were the youngest of two children, and one child was the youngest of three children. However, several of the families subsequently had further children which of course changed these family dynamics. Although some studies suggest that a gifted child may often be the eldest child (Davis & Rimm, 1998), generalizations should not be drawn from a study of only 11 participants. Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect the identity of participants.

Instruments and materials

The study had ethics approval from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, with the major fieldwork conducted 2001-2002. A range of formal and informal methods were used within a case study approach, including:

- standardized tests of reading, receptive language and visual problem-solving (Dunn, Dunn, Whetton & Burley, 1997; Gilmore, Croft & Reid, 1981; Neale, 1999; Raven, Raven & Court, 1998);
- special ability rating scales (Jones, 1988; McAlpine & Reid, 1996);
- semi-structured interviews with parents;
- informal interviews with teachers, parents, family members and children;

- a minimum of two hours of running record observation of play for each of the 11 children in early childhood settings, and a further minimum two hours observation in school settings for four children who were followed as they transitioned.

Of these methods, this paper primarily draws on the interviews with parents. This paper does not have the scope to discuss the other assessment methods.

Semi-structured parent interviews were generally conducted approximately one month after initial assessment of reading, for around 1.5 hours each. Five interviews were with mothers only, five interviews were with mothers and fathers together, and one interview with a grandmother and mother. In addition, informal discussions occurred throughout the study. The interview material was analysed using a constant comparative analysis approach (Mutch, 1995), with manual sorting and coding. Codes were both quasi-inductive, informed by literature; and quasi-deductive, derived from the data.

Parenting roles.

This section includes findings and discussion that relate to the roles of parents in the study. Themes from the parent interviews support three key roles of parents, including:

- identification of children's giftedness, strengths, and interests;
- advocacy for their children's rights and needs;
- being available and responsive to their children's strengths and interests.

All of these roles have the potential to support the work of teachers.

Identification

Within the study children were formally tested, with the following assessment results in years and months:

- *Chronological age* at time of first assessment: 4.01 to 4.10, (m=4.07);
- *Reading accuracy age* (Neale, 1999): 6.09 to 10.08, (m=7.11);
- *Reading comprehension* (Neale, 1999): 6.03 to 8.03, (m=6.10);
- *Reading rate* (fluency) (Neale, 1999): 7.0 to 13.0, (m=9.11);
- *Word reading age* (Gilmore, Croft & Reid, 1981): from 6.11-7.05 to 10.04-10.10, (m=8.03);

- *Receptive language percentile* (Dunn, Dunn, Whetton & Burley, 1997): 58 to 99, (m=78).

Of interest is that *all* parents identified their children as being advanced early readers *prior to formal assessment*. There was not a single family that nominated their children for inclusion in the study who had inflated or misjudged their child's ability in reading.

In terms of comprehension, Julia's mother knew that her daughter had understood the plays and novels she read in her free time because of the way she could discuss issues from the characters' perspectives. Gillian's early childhood teachers would not allow her to read books beyond her chronological age because they believed she did not have comprehension of the meaning of more advanced texts, but her parents disagreed:

They [early childhood teachers] were sending home books like "this is a cat, this is a dog". It was quite a fight to get her books at her level. They felt her comprehension was low, but I think she didn't know what they wanted. She would say "I don't know". She does understand [...] she knows what the character is feeling. Also, she'll be sitting in bed laughing, getting that from the text, getting feelings, humor, understanding (G.: parent interview).

Parents were also well aware of the exceptional speed of their children's reading. Erin, at four, did not like her mother reading to her anymore, because her mother read slower than Erin could read herself. Gillian's mother also commented on reading speed, stating, "She's galloping [...] gobbling up her book like eating very fast." Aspects of reading that formal assessment did not capture, but that parents usefully commented on, include the fervor, strong enthusiasm and delight displayed by the children. Erin, Gillian, Henry, Matthew, Nathan, and Oscar's families commented on the high level of reading engagement, the children's 'love of reading', and how they were 'devouring books'. This sort of information is crucial for teachers to learn about in order for the teachers to provide suitable and sufficient material for exceptional young readers.

As part of the research interview, parents were asked to complete a checklist of characteristics of special abilities (Jones, 1988). The following characteristics were identified by most of the 11

families as being relevant to their children; the numbers in parentheses indicate how many of the 11 families rated these characteristics in their children:

- asks a lot of questions (11);
- shows interest and aptitude in many areas (11);
- easily performs difficult manual tasks (10);
- has a larger than usual vocabulary for age (10);
- has a quick sharp memory (9);
- is able to verbally express ideas easily (9);
- has a long attention span (9);
- adjusts to change easily (8).

For teachers, knowing that these characteristics are signs of giftedness is important. Teachers have often misunderstood such child behaviours and focused their energy on encouraging children to act the same as their age peers, reinforcing a focus of normalization (Porter, 2005; 2008).

Parents were able to confidently discuss their children's learning, and shared relevant supporting anecdotes and examples to illustrate and justify their comments. Parents had a wealth of knowledge about children's individual strengths and interests, particularly dinosaurs, music, space. Some teachers, in either early childhood or school settings, consulted parents to find out about the children's strengths and interests. In other settings teachers were negating, disbelieving or negative about the children's giftedness. It is ideal that parents and teachers, and where appropriate other educational experts, collaborate together to share assessment information about the child (Rogoff, Goodman Turkanis & Bartlett, 2001). Each group of people is able to bring important information and assessment perspectives that contribute to collective understandings (Margrain, 2007). In Henry's case, his teacher differentiated the class study on The Ocean, providing opportunity for him to explore his interest in Antarctic Cod alongside his age peers who were looking generally at fish.

Advocacy

Advocacy is about supporting the best interest of children and speaking up for children's needs and rights. In this study there was tension between advocacy for children's individual needs and for their social acceptance. In many instances,

working to cognitive potential would conflict with social inclusion.

Children had learned at a young age to adjust their behaviour to different contexts, for example drawing complex maps at home but doing 'scribble pictures' with friends at an early childhood centre. I observed children change their level of vocabulary depending on their context, and being explicitly excluded from play when they used advanced conceptual thinking around their age peers. Many parents appeared to accept that disjointed functioning was necessary. Within the home context the parents provided the extension and challenge that their children craved, and they also valued social participation within early childhood and school settings. An important message for teachers is to remember not to assume that children's behaviour and skills demonstrated in school and early childhood settings reflects their potential or even their actual competency.

The study showed that the ability of parents to advocate for their children was limited by general social prejudice and misconception. On many occasions, parents felt that it was in their child's best social interests to hide their child's ability.

The parents focused their energy on supporting teachers and building relationships. A parent explained that she made sure that she gave affirming and positive comments to the teachers about their work. She washed paintbrushes and put away resources, helped clean at the end of the week, helped in the library, was on the fundraising committee, and helped with class trips. This parent hoped that the teacher would be more willing to communicate with her if ever there was an important issue about the child because of the parent's contribution of time and because she had resisted approaching the teacher with small concerns. Other parents were also careful to support the teachers, building the foundations of a positive relationship for the benefit of their children.

We tried very hard not to talk to other parents [about his reading] ... because it feels like you're boasting ... I feel very embarrassed, people will think I've been one of those pushy parents – it's not very trendy, popular, 'PC' [politically correct] [...] We went to see the kindly teachers when he first started kindly – I didn't want him to be misunderstood (H.: parent interview).

An example of advocacy was from David's mother to further support his passion for computers. David's older sister was attending an after school computer extension class, and David desperately pleaded to join. David's mother had difficulty convincing the coordinators that a four-year-old could cope with a formal learning programme for an hour. David's mother knew that his concentration span and persistence were well advanced for his age and she strongly advocated for him to be allowed to attend the computer classes. Eventually the computer class coordinator allowed David to attend on a trial basis, and it became the highlight of his week. However, David's early childhood teachers expressed horror that David was attending these classes as they assumed his parents were forcing formal learning experiences on him.

Responsive and available

The support provided by parents in this study illustrates their commitment to responsive approaches rather than overtly inducing or pressuring achievement. Parents noted that they were guided by their children's strengths and interests. This is a broad concept of 'teaching' rather than a deliberate, planned approach. Parents particularly noted the importance of communication within the family, responding to their children's questions, and readily providing information. Julia's family commented that "If she talks about something from [pre]school we talk, look in books, look on the Internet – a learning experience for us too [...] Generally whatever she talks about we read about it and talk to her about it." Nathan's mother reported "Our family makes a conscious effort to take time to talk to him as an adult, listen to what he has to say. If he asks a question we explain, we take the time."

The parents involved the children with daily life and activities that they also participated in. The children enjoyed sharing the following activities with parents: swimming, gym, singing, piano playing, visiting relatives, the park, beach, toy shops, train rides, baking, using the computer, reading, doing puzzles, board games, and doing housework. These examples illustrate that parents viewed their children's learning holistically. They did not focus exclusively on academic learning. Parents also appeared to have a practical understanding of their children's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978); demonstrating skill in recognizing teachable moments; and ensuring that learning was natural and easy for

children. Parents' comments indicated that they co-constructed learning with their children. Children's involvement with activities was seen by parents as *partnership* rather than as didactic teaching. Henry's father mentioned his son "*helping me* work on things in the garage" and his mother noted "we've spent quite a lot of time on the beach *together*". Isla's family noted their daughter enjoyed "*helping* feed the animals". Italics have been added to the above quotes to emphasize the discourse of partnership. In this respect, the parents' philosophy of learning aligns to contemporary early childhood practice in New Zealand, which embraces socio-cultural (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) and co-constructivist approaches to learning (Jordan 2004).

Parents strongly rejected that they had explicitly taught the children, possibly wanting to discount notions of formal teaching, hoarding or being 'pushy' parents.

Erin's mother said that she had tried to teach her older son to read, but he had struggled with literacy and was later diagnosed with a learning difficulty. As a result of this experience, she decided that she would definitely *not* try to teach Erin to read. She then became upset when Erin "taught herself" at an exceptional age as she felt this reinforced that as a mother she was "completely useless" to both of her children.

Other parents also stressed that they had not deliberately taught their children:

Compared with other children, she'll go into [her school] and they will not have experienced other children like her. In fact, I'm worried, and this is why I've not deliberately taught her [...] I'm too nervous to have a frank talk in case I get off-side with them. (I.: parent interview).

At no time did I set out to teach her to read. From her earliest years I have followed her lead and interests though I have introduced new books, tapes, ideas to her to see if she'd be interested in pursuing them. If not I've left it until a later time or dropped it. At all times I've been ultra careful with her attitude to learning, being careful not to turn her off in any way [original emphasis] (I.: parent interview).

All except one of the children in the study had substantial periods of one-to-one time with

caregivers, usually their mothers. The children all attended early childhood education centers, but mostly for sessional part-time attendance rather than for long hours. Most families in the study had a parent who was predominantly 'at home' for the children. The at-home parents discussed the importance of having 'quality time', and sufficient time with their children. These parents appreciated their children's curiosity and valued the extended conversations. The children had a sense of belonging in their relationships with these key adults who encouraged curiosity and inquiry. One mother stated, "I also like spending the afternoons with him" (A.: parent interview – original emphasis).

A lot of the time it's just me and Gill, one-to-one Gill and I [...] she likes having Mummy around. If I couldn't be there Mum [Gillian's grandmother] has been there for her [...] Isn't that what life's about – doing things [with your child]? [I'm] very fortunate to have been a Mum for the last four years (G.: parent interview).

Findings from this study suggest that having parent available to support and respond to the children enabled important time and one-to-one interaction which in turn supported the children to more readily realize their capabilities. Children and adults had sufficient time together to enable responsive and extended conversations. This paper does not argue against children's participation in larger groups and the benefits of social negotiation and interaction, but there is equally a case to be made for ensuring that children receive individual one-to-one time. While it is inequitable to assume that all children have at-home parents, or that parents are equally equipped to provide support, there may be other solutions for ensuring that children have quality individual interactions with key adults who can support and respond to them. Although teacher-child ratios may preclude extensive one-to-one interactions, current teaching pedagogy values the building of relationships. Home-based care options in early childhood, and home-based before and after-school care, may provide further opportunities for relationships and individual interactions. Grandparents were able to support and closely respond to children in many families within this study.

Misunderstandings.

Findings and discussion that relate to misunderstandings about parents are considered in this section. Parents reported several assumptions from teachers, friends and wider acquaintances, including suggestions that they were: hothousing and 'pushy'; overambitious; wealthy and privileged. Each of these assumptions will be considered, and a rationale provided for why it is a misconception for the parents in this study.

Hothousing, 'pushy' parents?

Gifted children often have a strong drive for success and achievement (McAlpine, 1996). Elkind (1987) states, many gifted children "demand stimulation from their parents at an early age; they gobble up information and are insatiable in their quest for knowledge about the world or for opportunities to exercise their talent" (p. 16). Where children have this strong self-determination, the children have not been induced or hothoused (Margrain, 2007). Where expectations of children's achievement are low, or they are unsupported, the children's learning growth will be stunted and constrained; they will fail to thrive (Colangelo, Assouline & Gross, 2004). Actions that parents take in supporting gifted children can be viewed as *responsive to* the children's strengths and interests rather than overtly 'pushy' (Bicknell, 2006). Parents within this study commented:

We [parents] were told early on that the best way to help is to give wide experiences – [we] looked laterally. We [...] involved them with daily life. Cooking is good with maths, reading, patterns, conclusions. We go to museums [...] love libraries. By encouragement and giving him time and the opportunity to do stuff [...] we haven't actually sat down and taught him stuff, except in a passive way, but I 'spouse reading is active (A.: parent interview).

I don't try to impose on him. He tells me "Mummy, I want to write, I want to read" [...] he wants to be a pilot so he knows how to read maps, knows continents [...] it depends on his interest, the more he knows (G.: parent interview).

Children's wellbeing and the intention to support them to flourish and blossom is at the heart of parent advocacy (Margrain, 2007). However, the advocacy of David's mother in response to his passionate pleading to take part in a computer class was viewed by his early childhood teacher with concern; she felt sorry for this 'poor child' that he was not allowed to play but was instead 'forced' into formal learning. Such reactions from friends, family, acquaintances, and other members of society meant that parents often kept quiet about their children's abilities; they were concerned that people would misjudge their parenting actions or the source of their children's competence.

In this paper, *responsive* teaching and parenting has been described rather than directive or didactic approaches. Reports of parents that followed the lead of their children within a holistic learning environment challenge the assumption that parents induce achievement through stressful, pressured approaches. Negative connotations of hothousing do not accord parents with sufficient respect for their support of children, and do not reflect partnership or empowerment as promoted in curricula (Ministry of Education, 1996; 2007). Parents of children in this study did not overtly cultivate, prune, or crop. Instead, parents nurtured and tended, ensured roots were well-nourished, and supported growth.

Overambitious?

Parents valued social, affective, and cognitive aspects of learning in early childhood. When one parent was asked if she had any goals for early childhood education for her daughter (Erin), the mother said that she wanted a "balanced education". Gillian's mother stated "I certainly don't want her knowing 10 times tables or reading at a particular level. She really enjoys it and that's the most important thing. Contentment, whether academic achievement or her own example is very important."

Two key themes emerged from data regarding parent expectations and values relating to beginning school. Firstly, parents affirmed that it was important their children were happy, confident, and settled. Secondly, they asserted the importance of challenge and stimulation that was appropriate for their children.

As the children in the study neared the age of five, thoughts about school became more important to both parents and children (in New Zealand children commonly begin school

individually on their fifth birthday). The parents were generally unconvinced that schools would be sufficiently challenging for their children. Parents were concerned that if their children became bored at school it would have a long-term negative affect on their learning and motivation. Parents wanted their children to be happy, to be accepted and to fit in, but they also wanted assurance that their children's individual needs, both social and academic, would be met. An example provided by the parents was to wonder what their children, as already able readers, would do when the class was learning basic alphabet letter names and sounds. The parents were worried that unless their children were recognized as 'different', they would not have their cognitive needs met. However, they were also concerned at possible consequences of 'being different', and wanted reassurance that their children would belong.

Mother: That he'll get enough stimulation to keep him intrinsically motivated, that he'll be happy, make friends, not be bullied in the playground [...]

Father: I hope that he'll find that he can learn a whole lot of new things, not just in books. If it's only what he [already] knows he'll wonder what the point is (H.: parent interview).

Hopefully, the school will understand her needs and be very conscious of not destroying the positive attitude she has at this stage, and that she will understand her personality [...] that she'll settle happily and is happy (I.: parent interview).

The findings from this study therefore indicate that the parents had realistic and holistic expectations. Parents in this study recognized the importance of affective outcomes and did not exclusively focus on academic achievement. They were also somewhat pragmatic about outcomes for children within early childhood and school settings. These findings negate common assumptions that parents of gifted children are overambitious. However, it is legitimate that parents should support the children's ambitions and advocate for education that supports the children to learn and achieve as fully as they wish.

[We] don't stop encouraging. We don't impose any limits on what he wants to do, or read, and [his sister]. We encourage them to do whatever they can. [...] I have tried to encourage him, point him in the right direction, open doors [...] If anything, the frustration is to convince the authorities that he's ready to do these things. They say we don't do these things before [age] 4 or 5, we need to keep at them to give him a shot (D.: parent interview).

Privileged?

Parents in the study were by no means exclusive or highly wealthy. While several of the parents had professional occupations, and owned their own homes, the families had also made decisions to have a parent largely at home, meaning they had to pay their mortgage and household expenses on one income. Some of the parents were occupied in trades, and in one family neither of the parents was employed.

Families explained many ways that they supported their children with little financial cost. They belonged to public libraries, went for walks to read car license plates and street signs, baked, visited the beach, went swimming, drew on recycled paper, made chalk pictures on concrete, visited grandparents, played chess, looked at the stars, bought games and books from weekend garage sales, and met with friends. A parent volunteered at a local bookshop, taking her child with her who 'read for hours'. Another family chose a particular school because it provided second language learning opportunities. Most of the children attended low-cost or free education and care services, such as kindergarten, and only two of the eleven children went on to attend private schools.

These examples illustrate that supporting gifted children is not the exclusive domain of privileged or wealthy families, and does not need to incur excessive costs. The greatest resources families drew on were their creativity, responsiveness and investment of personal time.

Conclusions.

Parents in this study played a key role in recognizing their children's strengths and interests and in identifying characteristics of giftedness. Although teachers had particular curriculum and assessment tools available, for example in

literacy, parents were also able to recognize aspects of comprehension, fluency, expressiveness, passion and engagement with reading. Other parents would equally be able to recognize other areas of early giftedness, such as mathematical giftedness or music prodigies. It is very important that teachers do not only rely on their own assessment processes, but that they also ensure they ask parents about their children. Parents will be able to provide teachers with examples of behaviours not displayed in classrooms or not readily assessable. For example, parents could tell teachers about a child's passionate interest in dinosaurs, or describe the kinds of reading material children read when at home.

In any education process it is important that teachers and parents effectively consult and collaborate. In New Zealand there is a common discourse of 'tall poppy syndrome', of negativity towards gifted learners and common assumption that their parents are hotheaded, 'pushy', over-ambitious or privileged. Instead of misjudging parents it is more useful to value their skills and knowledge. In many countries, the majority of teachers have little explicit training in meeting the needs of gifted children. In the absence of pre-service or ongoing professional development in gifted education, teachers can at least learn from parents and work in partnership with them for positive outcome of both gifted children, and also all learners. As advocates, parents have often read widely about giftedness and can have considerable content expertise to share on broad issues of gifted education, as well as particular knowledge about their individual child/ren. For example, parents can share information about emotional sensitivities that are often associated with giftedness and may have books to lend to teachers.

Parents in this study facilitated opportunities for ongoing learning and provided the key resource of their own time, one-to-one interaction and extended conversations. This is a particularly pertinent finding in an age where western societies increasingly encourage both parents to contribute to the workforce for economic reasons. As children spend longer days in larger group settings, such as daycare centers, or before and after school care services, the opportunities children have for one-to-one time with adults becomes compromised. This study illustrates the positive experiences for many of the children in having a parent predominantly at home to spend

time reading, baking, walking and talking together. In this New Zealand context, families largely had the economic privilege of being able to choose to have a parent at home; 81% of children under the age of 5 in New Zealand have their mother working less than 30 hours per week. This enabled all of the case study children to attend early childhood education on a part-time/sessional basis rather than fulltime, and to have part of their day with their parents. This in turn supported opportunities for responsiveness of parents. For example, a mother described 'simply' sitting down reading to her child for three hours one day, and another parent reported discussions with her child about space that went on for months, in increasing complexity. These examples would be hard to achieve in a model where parents collect their child at the end of a working day, managing to do little more than dinner, bath and bed routines. In those families where parents both needed to work, grandparents provided a key role in ensuring the children had an adult available during the day.

If, as a society, we agree that children deserve opportunities for one-on-one time, we need to explore creative ways to provide this, as not all families will be able or want to have a parent at home. Daycare centers and schools could adapt rosters or use peer-support mixed age buddy systems for older children to support younger

ones, and community mentors could be used more often. These approaches are useful for all children, but also for gifted learners. Mixed-age or peer mentoring approaches allow younger gifted children the opportunity to work with older, more capable peers who may well be intellectual peers. For older or more capable gifted children, working with other learners can provide opportunities for leadership. Mentoring involves bringing a member of the community in contact with a gifted learner to support a particular area of interest. Some examples might include a retired scientist meeting with a child passionate about physics, or a museum officer emailing a child with an interest in paleontology. These approaches can enable community and educators to work together. In addition, at all times, the voice and expertise of parents should also be included in provisions.

This New Zealand study endorsed that parents were able to identify their children's strengths and talents, acted as advocates to support their children, were responsive, and provided the key resource of time. These findings negate commonly held assumptions that the parents of gifted children are overtly 'pushy' or 'hothousing'. Instead, teachers can learn about giftedness from parents, and parents and teachers can work together to plan for positive outcomes for young gifted children.

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