

PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL REPORT

Observations on the Multi-Dimensional Model of Teaching Gifted Children

**MARY MILLER
GORE MAIN SCHOOL**

**PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL
21 SEPTEMBER 2016 - 14 DECEMBER 2016**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Gore Main School Board of Trustees, the Ministry of Education and Teach NZ for supporting my application for sabbatical leave in 2016.

Heartfelt thanks go to the Gore Main School staff and in particular to the school's Deputy Principal for allowing me to walk away knowing the school would continue to function as usual in my absence.

My sincere thanks goes to Rosemary Cathcart, who openly shared her thinking, time and practice with me, and for providing such a robust professional development online option geared for every level of schooling.

Thanks must go to Linda Fraser (Principal) and Jenny Stern (teacher of the gifted class) at West Gore School and Shona Hewlett (Principal) at Longford Intermediate, for taking time out of their day to share their knowledge and experience in this particular area.

I would also like to thank Nicola Millar, teacher at Gore Main School, who wrote a very insightful anecdotal diary of her journey using Rosemary Cathcart's Multi-Dimensional Planning Framework in her classroom, and to all the other teaching staff for willingly trialling this model and for being so openly reflective with me. Your open-mind set is much appreciated.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our learners with exceptional abilities deserve to have their needs met, just as much as any other child within the schooling system. Yet, at present within the education system, more often than not, they get a much smaller slice of resourcing than any other group of learners. Gifted learners are very complex in their needs, and in order to meet these needs requires understanding and knowledge of the child as a whole.

The REACH model and Multi-Dimensional Planning Framework ensure that these children's requirements can be met in their own classroom. The REACH model has been created by Rosemary Cathcart and she has utilised this conceptual model in her Multi-Dimensional framework.

The Multi-Dimensional planning model can be incorporated into existing planning within the school, and when learnt, is relatively easy to utilise. Not only do teachers purposefully cater for their children with exceptional abilities, but it also is very liberating in its approach to covering a broad based, child-targeted and exciting curriculum. Acceleration on its own does not cater for the gifted child as a whole and this is portrayed very strongly in the Multi-Dimensional Planning Model.

The Multi-Dimensional Planning Model is not restricted to subject, level, cultural or academic restraints. It can be used in normal classroom programming, specific accelerated classes or subject specialist classes, just to name a few.

PURPOSE

To research a Multi-Dimensional Model for teaching gifted children and trial this school-wide to see what success occurs for all year levels, and to gather feedback.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Over 2014 I completed the Certificate of Effective Practice in Gifted Education. This is an online course offered by REACH (Responding to Children with Exceptional Abilities) Education Consultancy. This course was created specifically to support schools in working successfully with gifted learners. It gives practical tools and strategies for teachers to utilise with gifted learners and has been designed and taught by educators with real expertise in the field of gifted education, based not only on their comprehensive academic knowledge but also on many years of their personal experience of working directly with gifted children, classroom teachers, and parents. The course is built around three interwoven themes - understanding, identifying and teaching gifted learners.

The Certificate of Effective Practice in Gifted Education was one of the most empowering Professional Development opportunities I have undertaken. The course provided tools that were not only research driven, but able to be trialled in our own school with an online tutor

assisting us along the way. The REACH material was delivered from March to September and incorporated twelve modules. Each fortnight a new module was studied where new skills were learnt. This meant that by the time we were robustly planning for our children with exceptional abilities, we also had the knowledge as to why such approaches would work the best, and why.

It became apparent that the reason why I had found it so difficult in the past to truly understand the needs of our children with exceptional abilities, was due not only to the complexity of these children, but also the image I had built up of what society portrays a gifted learner to look like and do. I had lacked real access to research-based professional development that answered the questions I had for these learners. Working in your own school, using your own learners to study, made the learning so much more powerful and informative.

To grasp the needs of children with exceptional abilities requires time to process their needs and complexities. Our teachers are already working so hard, and I knew specific time needed to be put aside for them also to have the opportunity to be upskilled, with appropriate support to put new learning into their classroom.

I applied for this sabbatical to give me time to further investigate the Multi-Dimensional Planning Model using the REACH concepts and to focus upon upskilling the Gore Main School staff.

The fact that Multi-Dimensional Planning caters for teachers at every level of schooling, appealed to me. Teachers could utilise these new learnt skills in any classroom, school, level or country. The course was comprehensive, practical, and offered me individual tutor support every step of the way.

I wanted to be able to give the staff the support, as I received, to ensure that they were able to trial a new planning method, and feel assisted and encouraged along the way, understanding why and how we were using certain concepts in our planning.

Special thanks must be given to Rosemary Cathcart who took time out of her busy day to discuss my sabbatical work, and to share her vast knowledge and skills on children with exceptional abilities.

METHODOLOGY

My sabbatical began by re-reading all the REACH course documentation and papers. I particularly took note around elements relating to the Multi-Dimensional Planning Model and the five REACH concepts.

In order to utilise the Multi-Dimensional Planning Model you have to first understand how and why a child with exceptional abilities is inherently different from the mainstream learner and why they need conceptual work.

This difference is purposefully covered for in the Multi-Dimensional Planning Model using the REACH concepts. I felt this Multi-Dimensional Planning Model could easily be incorporated within the current inquiry planning model occurring at our school. This, hence, was the focus of my sabbatical, to see how best we could incorporate the Multi-Dimensional Planning work schoolwide, using the REACH concepts. What worked, what needed changed, what was difficult and how we could overcome these barriers.

The initial Professional Development occurred with an hour long staff meeting as an introduction to Gifted Education. It was important that staff were upskilled so they would know not only how to plan but why they should plan that way for children with exceptional abilities. The Professional Development looked specifically at:

- What being gifted or having an exceptional ability is; and how to determine it.
- Implications for the identification of giftedness or children with exceptional abilities when looking at a broad range of giftedness.
- Current ways used in our school to identify children with exceptional abilities and the need to always remember that identification is a process.
- Identification of gifted traits.
- Characteristics that gifted learners display, and what environmental issues can constrain or encourage these.
- Testing vs. qualitative data.
- Personality factors in children with exceptional abilities.
- 2e (twice exceptional children).

Two weeks later a Teacher Only Day was held where more Professional Development occurred around Gifted Education. The key to this Professional Development was ensuring that the teachers' skills and knowledge was built upon, using their key experiences. Our Professional Development in the Teacher Only Day covered:

- How being gifted affects the child.
- Why change the school system?
- Auditory-Sequential Learners v's Visual-Spatial Learners. How do we know the difference?
- The characteristics of these learners – so teachers know what to look for in the classroom.
- Boys v's Girls achievement.
- The hurdles for gifted education.
- Giftedness and cultural difference.
- Gore Main School Survey questionnaire results from 2014 – our thoughts?
- How to teach children with exceptional abilities in their own classroom.
- Why the Multi-Disciplinary Model over others?
- Planning for Term 4 using the Multi-Disciplinary Model.
- Strategies in your planning that will and won't work for gifted learners.
- How to make the most of your classroom.

FINDINGS

It is important to realise that when using the Multi-Dimensional Planning method children are set a **minimum of tasks, not a maximum**. This is based on the premise that children with exceptional abilities frequently want to do more than the minimum, but we also must remember that there are times that they choose to do only the minimum in extreme depth. Allowing a minimum set of tasks allows teachers both these responses to be provided for. (Cathcart; Rosemary. 2005. They're Not Bringing My Brain Out. Page 103.)

Children have **choice** within the Multi-Dimensional Framework to do **individual or group work**. Children with exceptional abilities sometimes prefer to do tasks as individuals, as this often makes it easier for them to work at a pace that they wish to, and to go to the depth of learning that they require, however there are other children who would prefer to work alongside their peers.

Differing tasks that are devised for the whole class should include those at **differing levels of ability** under each heading in the Multi-Dimensional Model. However these differing gradients of level **should not be labelled**, as this could stop some children trying them. Such tasks may help children to reach their full potential, or to find a child with exceptional abilities that may be choosing to hide their potential in the classroom for whatever reason.

The staff found that brainstorming in-depth as a whole school looking at the three questions: "why study this", "key concepts" and "issues" made them think **more deeply about their inquiry work**. Spending time on these areas led to more in-depth analysis of the study by the teachers, and led them to think more widely just like the children in their class would. They liked the need for creative ideas and felt that this would cater more specifically for their Gifted Visual-Spatial learners.

IMPLICATIONS

The teacher's **role** is crucial using the REACH model and the Multi-Dimensional framework. The **relationship** between the learner and teacher is vital, as a collaborate culture, needs to be set. If a child feels safe and secure in their classroom learning environment, able to take risks with their learning, and not afraid to make mistakes, they will learn much more, than if they were afraid of the repercussions of being wrong.

It should also be ensured that the **topic is clearly defined**, the **study is soundly constructed**, that **relevant skills are known or taught** before they are needed, and that appropriate **guidance and support** is given throughout. It was felt that some of the unit examples given from Rosemary Cathcart's 'Differentiation Made Practical' didn't really show when the relevant skills were taught in depth, even though we know that would have happened. The Gore Main School staff believed it was important to ensure that the children are loaded with the skills for their learning when needed and likewise encouraged to continue at their own pace when required. Rosemary Cathcart explains this requirement at length in her book

‘They’re Not Bringing My Brain Out,’ something that the staff felt was really important for people to know.

Teachers need to **understand the gifted learner** when using this model, so they understand what they are doing and why. This understanding builds compassion and knowledge for these learners, which in turn builds up the relationship between students in the classroom.

In order to ensure that children with exceptional abilities are catered for, teachers need to have a good understanding of how the **brain works** and the **differing learning styles**. Such knowledge takes time and resourcing, as research is continually teaching us new ideas in this field.

Gifted children are **conceptual thinkers**. They are very strongly interested in understanding the **why** and **how** things work, in **understanding the reasons behind what they experience** or are told. Their compulsion to make sense of the world around them, means that they are incapable of just accepting that something is so, just because someone said it. It is this drive that can come across as challenging to a teacher, but lead to new discoveries as an adult. Such a drive takes the teacher’s time in the classroom and can lead inquiry studies in completely new directions. Teachers need to be able to be flexible to welcome this in their classroom.

Time needs to be given for teachers to plan thoroughly and for them to utilise the **‘why study this,’ ‘concepts’ and ‘issues.’** Going over these areas really helps plan in-depth and broaden thinking for the area of study. It also prepares the teachers to think of the range of thinking that a gifted learner can take.

BENEFITS

We must identify the **key needs** that gifted children or children with exceptional abilities require. The REACH model provides a framework for building a programme that will genuinely generate a **high level of interest in learning**.

Children with exceptional abilities need to have:

- A high level of interest in learning generated.
- Skills taught to them so they are able to access advanced learning (tools of thought).
- Challenges, in order to develop their intellectual and creative potential.
- Their emotional, social and ethical development fostered – holistic development.

The REACH model enabled us to look closely at setting up an **invitational learning environment** that automatically helped to create the right kinds of learning opportunities for gifted children. Teaching our gifted learners is **not just about acceleration**. These children need all their needs met, and the Multi-Dimensional Planning Model alongside the REACH concepts allows for this.

Building **choice** into teaching programmes means that teachers make themselves more easily available for individual or small-group work with gifted children. This gives us flexibility to build-in work for those children with exceptional abilities without making things too difficult for other children. Twists often happen in learning when children are engaged and focussed on their ideas, and teachers need to bend and mould with this learning.

The Multi-Dimensional Planning framework meant that we could **utilise the existing Gore Main School planning** to help us adapt, extend, and enrich our existing programmes, rather than planning a completely separate programme.

The **REACH model does not have a set curriculum** – the teacher decides what happens and when, and builds choice for the student within the given framework. The planning framework sets out the key concepts and their key strategies as a series of questions. It provides an easy and immediate check on what is happening. This, utilised within the Multi-Dimensional framework, makes creative planning easy. Children are allowed the scope that suits them within this framework which caters for all learners – those who wish to push ahead, and those who require more assistance.

The **model provides a teaching approach that meets the learning needs of all children**, including those children with exceptional abilities. All the staff, at all year levels (Years 0-6), felt that this planning model worked for them for all their learners, and particularly for their gifted students.

Greater **enthusiasm and commitment** has been viewed from the classes, high levels of involvement and achievement, and children spontaneously producing extra work in the classroom.

Children became more accustomed to finding each other working on differing tasks. It then became more accepted for children with exceptional abilities to be able to work at his or his own level without being so set apart from others. **This differentiation became part of the cultural norm.**

The staff, through their comprehensive learning, came to understand that children with exceptional abilities need the opportunity to use **visual aids** as much as any other learner.

The Multi-Dimensional Planning meant that **independent learning** and using strategies such as **‘work in progress’** were acceptable and became part of the culture. A ‘work in progress’ model meant that students could leave the work they were doing and come back to it at a later date. Choice within the classroom enables this to work very well, and for our gifted learners, they are able to think and ponder over their work and come back to it when they are ready. Independent learning creates opportunities for gifted children to work at their own level in ways which reduce the need for constant supervision.

The Multi-Dimensional Model provides a **framework** for organising lesson ideas. The staff found that this framework enabled them to plan more widely, thinking conceptually rather than just outcome based. Having a specific learning outcome model, only gives teachers just that, as its best. **Thinking conceptually means there are no limits**, and children can go as far as they want. Teachers when using the initial three questions, have also had the opportunity to think conceptually, opening up their minds to varying learning and enabling them to think outside of the square. The questions led staff to think more deeply about the teaching and learning in their classroom and hence had huge benefits for the students.

One staff member felt that perhaps the 'Finding out facts stage' should be **renamed** 'Finding our facts and preparing for our creativity phase.' Having options to rethink and make changes to fit our classrooms, as long as the philosophy is sound, is great.

Creating a **rubric** with the children and using this as an **assessment method** worked exceptionally well. The children, when creating their rubric went in-depth, and during the progression of their work went back and **reflected on how they were doing** in relation to what they had on their rubric. The rubrics were also displayed very differently within the classrooms depending on what the children chose to do.

Resourcing was found to be very important by the staff. **"It is important to have a range of materials (art) available when you give children choice, because they all require different things and have different ideas. I had to buy some bits and pieces for the students in order for them to put together their vision. The students who were creating things digitally also printed out their work in colour, so this needs to be considered. If you give students choice, you need the resources."** (Mrs Nicola Millar – teacher Gore Main School). Certainly programming does need to be resourced, and teachers need to have the ability to purchase what is required for the students to encourage their learning. Schools at present have such tight budgets that this can be problematic, but certainly not unsolvable.

The staff felt that this model gave them the ability to **feel more planned**. This was due to the three in-depth questions asked at the planning phase.

This **model caters for all students**. Gifted students, in particular were pushed and enabled in their learning. Our children with exceptional abilities came up with remedies for areas that they were challenged in, which I believe is a true sign of a framework within a classroom that not only supports, but scaffolds their learners to **'Reach for the Stars.'**

CONCLUSIONS

The trial at our school utilising the REACH model and Multi-Dimensional framework showed emphatically that the benefits were huge to all our learners, especially those children with exceptional abilities. Whilst ultimately we would love to have a specific class for these children to work together in, if this is not possible, then the Multi-Dimensional Model certainly enables us to cater for these learners.

We have a chance within our school to cater for those children with exceptional abilities in all areas of the school sector, within the classroom they are currently a part of.

REFERENCES

BOOKS

Cathcart; Rosemary. (2005). They're Not Bringing My Brain Out. Understanding and Working With Gifted and Talented Learners. 3rd Edition. Hodder Education.

Cathcart; Rosemary (2010). Differentiation Made Practical. Lessons to satisfy gifted learners, their classmates and teachers. Essential Resources Educational Publishers Limited, 2010.

Cathcart; Rosemary. (2010). Gifted Programming Made Practical. A common sense guide to developing your gifted programme.

Silverman; Linda Kreger. (2000). Identifying Visual-Spatial and Auditory-Sequential Learners: A Validation Study. In N. Colangela & G. Assouline (Eds.), Talent development V: Proceedings from the 2000 Henry B. and Jocelyn Wallace National Research Symposium on Talent Development. Scottsdale, AZ: Gifted Psychology Press (in press).

ARTICLES

Bevan-Brown; Jill (2005). Providing a Culturally Responsive Environment for Gifted Maori Learners. International Education Journal. 150-155. ISSN 1443-1475. Shannon Research Press.

Bruzzano-Ricci; Carole (2005). Gifted/ADD? Or Gifted/Learning Disabled? Removing the Mask of Frustration. Tall Poppies Magazine.

Cathcart; Rosemary (2004). Gifted is as Gifted Does. Education Today, Issue 5.

Cathcart; Rosemary (2008). The Conundrums of Success. REACH Education Consultancy. Keynote address, 'Celebrating Ability', 12th National Conference of the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, July 9-11, 2008, Hobart, Australia.

Christie; Michael. Some Aboriginal Perspectives on Gifted and Talented Children and Their Schooling. <http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/yaci/docs/Aboriginal-Perspectives-On-Gifted-Children%20190910.pdf>

Fischer; Claude S (May/June 2013). Getting Smarter Boston Review.

Gibson; Kay (Monday, January 16, 2006). Chapter 7. The Australian Aboriginal View of Giftedness.

Gurian, Anita. Gifted Girls – Many Gifted Girls, Few Eminent Women: Why?
http://www.comallie-caplan.com/Presentations/SI2008/gifted_girls_many_gifted_g.pdf

Kerr, Barbara (March 7, 2000). Gender and Genius. Center for Gifted Education. College of William and Mary. A keynote speech to the National Curriculum Networking Conference.

Kingore; Bertie (Spring 2004). High Achiever, Gifted Learner, Creative Thinker. Understanding our Gifted. www.bertiekingore.com

Kingore; Bertie. Differentiating Instruction To Promote Rigor and Engagement For Advanced and Gifted Students. <http://www.bertiekingore.com/rigor.htm>

Lind; Sharon (2001). Overexcitability and the gifted. The SENG Newsletter. 2001, 1(1) 3-6.

Langille; Jane (January 2004, Winter Issue. ISSN 1185-362X). Gifted Boys and Gender Issues. ABC News Magazine.
<http://janelangille.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/03/WebJan2004.pdf>

Mendaglio; Sal (2002). Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted. Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration: Some implications for teachers of gifted students. AGATE Fall 2002, 15(2), 14-22.

Natcharian; Lisa (2010). Real Learning: Meet the Perfectionists.

Niederer; Kate (2002). Mathematically Gifted Students. Tall Poppies. 2002. Vol 27 No 3.

Passow, A H; Schiff; J H (1989). Designing a global curriculum. Gifted Education International. Vol 6, pp 68-70. A B Academic Publishers.

Renzulli; Joseph S (2002). Expanding the Conception of Giftedness to Include Co-cognitive Traits and Promote Social Capital. Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.

Rutherford; Justine (2001). A Rose by Anther Name. Tall Poppies. Volume 26. Number 3.

Rocheffoucauld; Francois de la. The HighQ Community. The height of cleverness is to be able to conceal it.

Silverman; Linda. Asynchronous Development: A Key to Counselling the Gifted.

Silverman; Linda. The False Accusation of Elitism. Gifted Development Center.
http://www.supradotati.ro/resurse/The_False_Accusation_of_Elitism.htm

Silverman; Linda (1979-2009). What We Have Learned About Gifted Children. 30th Anniversary.

Silverman; Linda. Why We Need Gifted Education. Gifted Development Center.
<http://spotidoc.com/doc/244373/why-do-we-need-gifted-education>

Sword; Lesley K (2000). I think in Pictures, You Teach in Words: The Gifted Visual Spatial Learner.

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.459.970&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Tolan; Stephanie (1996). Is it a Cheetah?

Tolan; Stephanie (February 1999). Dabrowski's Over-excitabilities. A Layman's Explanation. Hoagies' Gifted Education Page. February 1999.

Yukich; Rose (November 1996). Not just a Load of old Rubbish. Playcentre Journal.

VIDEO CLIPS

He just sued the school system.

https://www.facebook.com/groups/nzprincipalsseniorleaders/1179119832163118/?notif_t=group_activity¬if_id=1476005984939113

The Visual Spatial Learner (Pt. 1 of 3).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RF6mh5TNcUk>

The Visual Spatial Learner (Part 2 of 3).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llkhP7ylx3Y>

The Visual Spatial Learner (Part 3 of 3).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLeuK7GnQww>

JOURNAL

Millar; Nicola (2016). Anecdotal journal on using the Multi-Dimensional Planning Model and the REACH concepts.