



## **Sabbatical Report**

# **To investigate pathways to promote student engagement, progress and achievement of Gifted and Talented students**

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# PRINCIPAL SABBATICAL REPORT

## TERM 3 – 2014

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This sabbatical has allowed me time to support my own leadership development, providing time for refreshment reflection and professional development, to see beyond my own school; to challenge my thinking.

*One of the most crucial skills that a principal must have is the ability to be involved in reflective action. That is to say that they must be able to think critically about the events that occurred, and are occurring, and be able to plan future action. David Stewart*

## **Purpose**

### **To investigate pathways to promote student engagement, progress and achievement of Gifted and Talented students**

- To look into what opportunities schools are using with regard to meeting the needs of their Gifted and Talented students
- To consider how the ‘one day’ GATE school option supports schools to meet the needs for their GATE students, where it is available and alternatives where ‘one day schools’ are not available, as is currently the case in our region.

## **Background and Rationale:**

I have been in my current primary school, Welbourn School, as Principal for 14 years.

Welbourn School is a contributing Year 1-6 urban New Plymouth school with a current roll of 380 pupils. Our school community developed vision underpins all our planning and actions. We want Welbourn School to be a place where every child is given the opportunity to develop as Confident, Capable, Creative, Connected, and Engaged Life Long Learners.... Soaring to Success. We have high expectations for all our students.

### **NAG1**

- iii c on the basis of good quality assessment information, identify students and groups of students; who have special needs; **including gifted and talented students**
- iv **develop and implement teaching and learning strategies to address the needs of students and aspects of the curriculum identified in iii above;**

**Welbourn Strategic Plan GOAL 1** in our school strategic plan reflects the intent of NAG 1 with one of the strategies (see below) related directly to GATE provision.

<b>GOAL 1: : To provide quality Teaching and learning programmes that meet individual needs and abilities, giving emphasis to the core areas of Literacy and Numeracy and achievement in relation to the National Standards .</b>	
<i>To make a positive difference to and improve student learning and achievement, the needs and talents of each student needs to be identified and catered for. <b>Our vision is for every child to develop as Confident, Capable, Creative, Connected, Engaged Life Long learners .... Soaring to Success</b></i>	
<b>STRATEGIES</b> Strategic activities to reach our goal	<b>OUTCOMES</b> What the goal will look like when achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A Gifted and talented programme is implemented, which identifies and caters for children’s needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welbourn school based curriculum guides teaching and learning at Welbourn School; enriched programmes are responsive to student needs and community priorities</li> <li>• Students are engaged learners, working to their potential.</li> </ul>

I have a keen interest in Gifted and Talented education. Our school undertook an in-depth self-review of our GATE provision in 2010, with support from a Massey University GATE advisor Pearl Nalder, and have since been working on our 'next steps' in our annual action plans. It is time to again review our plan and make further decisions on areas for development and consider opportunities to best meet the needs of our students. This sabbatical focus was planned to support and inform our school self-review and to also share relevant findings with our local Principal Association.

The New Zealand Curriculum/ Marautanga o Aotearoa acknowledges the particular needs of gifted and talented learners. It is designed to allow for flexibility of application so that the needs of diverse learners can be appropriately responded to. It has provided schools with the opportunity to be responsive to local community aspirations, their student needs and be 'future focused'. This is fundamental to providing a learning environment that meets the abilities, interests and needs of the gifted and talented.

This blog post on the NZCGA site; June 2014 by Rebecca Howell, the senior Education consultant for potential Plus UK (see below) particularly resonated with me and reinforced my decision to look again at what we are currently doing for our gifted and talented learners. It would be useful as a starting point with staff when undertaking self- review on GATE provision.

### **6 Important Reasons to Nurture Gifted Children**

The one thing that gifted children share is the ability to learn quickly when they are enthused, not stressed and not being affected by any difficulties they face. Many are passionate learners when they are well supported and barriers are removed. Sometimes they learn far too quickly for the system they are in, sometimes the lack of support they experience (for their strengths and weaknesses) gets in the way of them being able to achieve and thrive. So why do we need to provide for gifted children? The reasons are pinpointed and explained below.

#### **1. Gifted Children are a Significant Minority**

Education systems and societies are set up for the majority. However, a fair system attempts to cater for significant minorities within them. Gifted children, at a minimum, are defined at 5% of the child population. 5% of the child population is a large number. This represents approximately 38,000 school children in New Zealand alone.

2. If a society sets out to be inclusive, then it needs to try and include this significant minority. If education sets out to promote learning and help children progress, then it needs to ensure this significant minority are enthused in their learning and progressing. If schools set out to teach children strategies for learning and living a successful life, then they need to make sure they are teaching relevant strategies to this significant minority.

#### **3. Gifted Children are Vulnerable**

Research shows that gifted children suffer from a variety of issues that can affect their achievement and mental health if not supported. These include anxieties, perfectionism, attention difficulties, sensory issues, emotional sensitivity, organisational difficulties and self-criticism.

4. In addition, gifted children can have multiple diagnoses such as high functioning autism or attention deficit disorders. Supporting these diagnoses alone, without taking

account of their high cognitive ability or achievement, would lead to disaffection and demotivation. Gifted children's vulnerability leaves them at risk of underachievement. They are prone to getting frustrated and demotivated when their education is at the wrong level or teaching doesn't keep up with their thought processes. They are also sensitive to teaching style; being especially sensitive to fairness, tone of voice, enthusiasm for the subject and the integrity of the teacher.

5. **Gifted Children are Lonely**

Although there are approximately 38,000 of them in New Zealand; these children are in all age groups and spread across the nation's schools. It is rare to find more than one gifted child in a regular primary school class. Unless they are given the opportunity to work and make friends with other children of a similar ability, gifted children feel different, miss out on establishing meaningful relationships, suffer from a lack of self-esteem, remain unchallenged in their knowledge and views, and may dumb down or lose their passion for learning.

6. **Gifted Children are Asynchronous**

All children develop at different rates in different areas but gifted children's abilities mean that these differences are more pronounced, often markedly so. They are at risk of being misunderstood because adults (and children) around them either expect them to be more mature than their age because of their ability, or expect them to act their age when they are capable of very complex thinking.

7. **Gifted Children are Complex**

Gifted children are difficult to understand and often have many layers to them. As well as the asynchronous development and vulnerabilities already mentioned, they often think in abstract ways, make big leaps in understanding at times and little progress at others, and make complex connections. It can be very difficult for people to understand all of this and provide appropriately for them.

8. **Gifted Children are an Untapped Resource**

The abilities and creative ways of thinking that gifted children are capable of are a resource that can be used by the nation to solve problems, improve the wellbeing of the populace and create a better economic climate for all. If they are left unsupported, gifted children will not achieve the considerable potential they have and this opportunity will be missed.

In a recent educational gazette feature article (Tuesday 15 July 2014); '*Developing the next generation of innovators*', by Dr Kate Niederer and Marie Nordstrom, the latest PISA results were reviewed to look at how we're providing for our most gifted students. The article highlighted the following "**The December 2013, report showed that New Zealand has a slightly larger proportion of high performing students compared with the OECD average. New Zealand has almost twice the proportion of all-rounders (top performers in all three areas of reading, mathematics, and science) than the OECD on average. The OECD suggests that these are the pool from which countries will get their next generation of innovators; however, the PISA results also show that there has been a decrease over time in the proportion of New Zealand students achieving at the highest levels: Top performing readers decreased from 19 per cent to 14 per cent (between 2000–2012). Top performing science students decreased from 18 per cent to 13 per cent (between 2006–2012).**

**Top performing mathematics students decreased from 21 per cent to 15 per cent (between 2003–2012).**

**Whilst New Zealand’s ‘future talent pool’ is still higher than average, the declining proportion of students in the top performing group is a concerning trend.”**

*Source: PISA 2012 - New Zealand Summary Report, Ministry of Education (December 2013), p22.*

*www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/PISA/pisa-2012/pisa-2012-new-zealand-summary-report*

## **Activities undertaken- Methodology**

These were the key areas of process for my sabbatical study –

- ▶ Professional reading; utilised the TKI Gifted and Talented online portal and related readings.
- ▶ Meetings with president and members of local NZGCA- Taranaki Explorers
- ▶ Meetings with and observing One day School programmes in action with Sandie Purdie, Lead Teacher for the One Day Schools in Auckland and teacher Susan Jackson, Mary St George, teacher of the One Day School in Hamilton and Lead Teacher for the Gifted Online Programme, Sue Barriball; Associate Principal, Gifted Kids programme, Sue Breen, lead teacher of Small Poppies.
- ▶ Meeting with Dr Kate Niederer, Cognition Education Ltd; experienced gifted education researcher, lecturer and practitioner.
- ▶ Visited schools in Auckland who have children attending one day school.
- ▶ Survey sent to schools in our North Taranaki area.

## **Findings from Readings and discussions**

The Ministry of Education’s gifted and talented website (<http://gifted.tki.org.nz>) has a wide range of useful resources to inform school self-review, to support teachers to identify students’ gifts, differentiate teaching and assess learning. It has links to other websites, services, support for gifted and talented education, professional learning and development and relevant research. The Strengths and Needs Assessment template, which is a self- review tool for schools and two Ministry of Education readings on the website, are very useful resources to inform school self-review on how well as a school we are meeting the needs of gifted and talented learners and areas for improvement. *Gifted and talented students, Meeting Their Needs in New Zealand Schools; MOE 2012 and Nurturing Gifted & Talented students, a parent- teacher partnership.*

### **Key themes that have arisen from these and other readings;**

- **Definition and Identification**
- **Differentiation**
- **Professional Development**
- **Self-Review**
- **Partnerships**

**What is gifted?** "Gifted and talented learners are those with exceptional abilities relative to most other people. These individuals have certain learning characteristics that give them the potential to achieve outstanding performance". *MOE, 2001*. Giftedness is involuntary - a natural gift. It gives no cause for claims of elitism. Out of every hundred children, approximately ten can be classified as "gifted", yet only a small proportion may be identified as such in school.

## Definition and Identification

It is important for schools to have collaboratively developed with all stakeholders, inclusive and appropriate definitions and identification processes for gifted and talented students that reflect student diversity and encompass a variety of gifts and talents.

- ▶ School communities should collaboratively develop their definition of giftedness and talent based on research and theory which reflects their unique school culture.
- ▶ Identification procedures should include a multi-category approach that acknowledges a diverse range of special abilities and qualities, including multicultural perspectives.
- ▶ A range of research is now available to support us in schools to consider Māori concepts of giftedness and talent. Using this as a starting point when consulting with our local iwi and whanau will help us to refine our processes for our own school context.
- ▶ It is important to recognise potential as well as demonstrated performance.
- ▶ The six profiles of gifted and talented students *Betts and Neihart (1988)* are useful when both identifying and considering the differences among gifted students and how to best meet their needs.

1. *The Successful Gifted*; these students achieve highly at school and are the group most likely to be identified as gifted and talented. They are conforming, eager for the approval of others, and perfectionistic. They lack autonomy and assertiveness and avoid taking risks.

2. *The Creative Gifted*; these students are highly creative but frustrated, bored, questioning, and sometimes rebellious. They do not conform to the school system and often challenge school rules and conventions.

3. *The Underground Gifted*; these students deny their abilities in order to fit in. They may be insecure, shy, and quiet, avoid taking risks, and resist challenges. Many are never identified as gifted.

4. *The At-risk Gifted*; these students are resentful and angry because they feel that the system has failed to meet their needs. They are often perceived as "rebellious loners" and can be disruptive or withdrawn. Their schoolwork is inconsistent, and their levels of achievement fall well below their ability.

5. *The Twice/Multi-exceptional Gifted*; these students are gifted but also have a physical or sensory disability or a learning difficulty. Often their giftedness goes unrecognised because people fail to see past their disability. They can become angry and frustrated and may feel powerless.

6. *The Autonomous Learner*; these students are confident, independent, and self-directed. They are intrinsically motivated and willing to take risks. They set goals for themselves and take responsibility for their own learning.

Not all students are globally gifted. Schools should also consider the differences between high achieving and gifted students. High achieving gifted students are the most likely to be selected by schools for GATE programmes, while some under achieving gifted students may be overlooked for programme provision.

“Twice exceptional children are those who are both gifted and have a specific learning need. While they can be highly able, they may struggle within the education system as the work they produce often fails to represent what they are truly capable of. This can lead to feelings of anger, despair, and a lowered self-concept. These children are at serious risk of underachievement, which can worsen as they progress through the schooling system.” *Dr Kate Niederer.*

## **Differentiation**

Schools and teachers need to provide challenging and differentiated programmes for gifted and talented students in the regular classroom.

Differentiation involves providing learning experiences to suit the needs of each individual student within an environment that accepts diversity. Differentiation does not just apply to developing cognitive abilities but also to the development of qualities, culturally valued abilities, skills, learning dispositions, self-esteem, perseverance, creativity, and risk taking. In practice, differentiation affects:

- Content (what is taught and learnt – ideas, concepts, skills, information)
- Processes (the way in which content is presented and learned)
- Products of learning (what is produced to demonstrate learning)
- Environment (the physical structure of a setting, its organisation, and its social and emotional climate).

My conversation with Dr Kate Niederer made me think further on differentiation. She referred to an activity used with schools to consider differentiation. Teachers are asked to put down activities they could ask the children to do related to an inquiry and group these from least to most challenging, including something they would plan for their gifted students. Other teaching teams are asked to critique these and move them if needed. If the task is then put to a group of gifted learners, more often than not these children would rarely group any of the tasks into the highly challenging category where teachers had placed some of their activities.

What can make the most difference for children in classes is the level of challenge. If we put high level challenge regularly into our classrooms as some of the choices, this can be as successful at identifying gifted children as formal identification processes.

Above level testing can also be really useful to accurately identify the gifted student’s current level of knowledge and skills. It is important to find the child’s starting point and move them on from there, which we should be doing for all learners. The difference for the gifted learner is the pace is faster.

“Acceleration can take many forms. Acceleration allows students to progress through the curriculum at their own pace, from their identified starting point. This may mean a student skipping ahead two years in all subjects, or moving to a different class for just one subject. It could also mean working through the curriculum within their normal classroom, at a faster pace.” *Dr Kate Niederer*

Writing can be a barrier for some gifted learners, particularly twice exceptional learners. In my visits teachers provided tools and assistive technology to support these learners. E.g. Dictaphone; dictated text that is then written up for them. A number of Ipad apps were also used, including those which provide predictive text. Graphic organisers are often used for those who are overwhelmed by their number of ideas and find it difficult to begin. Learning to touch type has also been supportive for some older children.

Observed at One day schools were a number of gifted writers, however for those where writing was a barrier, choices were provided in the way information and thinking was shared, including alternatives to a lot of writing. Some examples seen working successfully included; Numbering or highlighting words and then numbering position in response to questions on a graphic organiser, cartoon strips, and reworking and recreating existing text on a computer. Purposeful activities that develop fine motor skills are included in the Small Poppies programme for children and boys, in particular, who can be at risk of underachievement through poor fine motor skills.

## **Professional Development**

Schools need to participate in ongoing school wide professional development to meet the needs of their gifted and talented children. Professional learning and development is an essential ingredient in developing, implementing, and maintaining effective programmes for gifted and talented students (Riley and Moltzen, 2010). It is also one of the core principles for gifted and talented education in New Zealand.

For professional learning and development programmes to be effective, the programmes need to:

- ▶ actively involve school leaders
- ▶ use a collaborative inquiry approach
- ▶ be contextually based.

**GATE Learning Communities;** These have been established this year in Auckland by Cognition Education to provide a framework for educators to learn and share best practice for gifted students based on national and international research. The Learning Communities are groups of educators (teachers, GATE Coordinators, Senior Management) who are interested in learning more about gifted and talented education. The Learning Communities are based on the BES for Teacher Professional Learning and Development, as well as Guskey (1995) guidelines where research for pre-reading and prior thinking is provided before each Learning Community meeting. Each Learning Community session is framed by a theme each term, with opportunities provided to network and receive guidance on particular GATE areas that the learning community would like to address. Benefit seen by one participant talked to was the networking; working with schools across levels Primary to Secondary. Facilitator Dr Kate Niederer sees the programme as possible to be taken to other regions in the future

**Ministry of Education whole school professional development;** Schools can apply for this again in 2015. In order to apply for it, schools need to have gifted and talented in their school charter. Professional development is personalised to the school needs, following a review of where the school is at.

**Individual Professional development;** A range of options are also available for individual study. Utilising the wealth of readings available has been useful for my reflection. Some teachers talked to had completed the REACH year long course; Certificate in effective practice in gifted education, which they saw as a good starting point. It was very practical, with ideas that can be used in the classroom. Universities are offering a range of study options including post graduate papers and professional development options.

## **Self-Review**

Schools need to implement appropriate self-review processes to determine the effectiveness of provision for gifted and talented students.

The five evaluation questions used by ERO (2008a) can be a good starting point for school self-review: The report provides school case studies of successful GATE provision related to these questions.

- ▶ How well does the school leadership support the achievement of gifted and talented students?
- ▶ How inclusive and appropriate are the school's processes for defining and identifying giftedness and talent?
- ▶ How effective is the school's provision for gifted and talented students?
- ▶ How well does the school review the effectiveness of their provision for gifted and talented students?
- ▶ To what extent do the gifted and talented programmes promote positive outcomes for their gifted and talented students?

The School self-review document used in the MOE GATE professional development project uses self-review matrices. Schools can use these themselves; however they can be more rigorous when unpacked with a GATE facilitator.

Inquiry into educational success for gifted Māori learners always needs to be part of schools' self-review. Schools when engaging in ongoing discussions with Māori students, parents, whānau, and iwi about what "Māori enjoying educational success as Māori" means in their school community should also include discussion about what gifted Māori learners require in order to 'realise their own unique potential' and succeed in their lives as Māori.

## **Partnerships**

There are many reasons why schools need to review their processes on how they are catering for their gifted and talented learners. Many things I came across in my readings highlighted the challenges for schools, teachers, family and whanau of gifted children and the gifted children themselves.

The NZAGC Forum Messages, to which I subscribe, regularly has posts from parents regarding schooling options, many expressing frustrations with school provision for their children both at a school wide level and from teacher to teacher within a school. Parents question how to get school support for their child and who to talk to. Questions related to schools centre around such things as; whether to have educational psychologist assessments, whether to ask for their child to be accelerated or not, what school provisions are available in

particular regions which support gifted students. I came across similar issues when speaking with parents of gifted children during my visits to gifted programmes. Some felt schools weren't differentiating the programme for their child sufficiently to provide challenge and engagement. A child sitting through classroom teaching sessions on learning they already 'knew' was resulting in the child switching off and often becoming school reluctant. Conversely, very productive home- school partnerships are in place and working well. It is important to ensure systems are in place which give parents' an opportunity to share information about their children, particularly when they are transitioning to a new school. A carefully selected checklist can be helpful, alongside areas for anecdotal information.

## **Findings from my School visits**

Across all the settings I visited I found the teachers and people I met were passionate about meeting the needs of gifted children. The teachers were either gifted themselves or had family members who were gifted, some of whom had been underserved in the past in our schooling system. They were very skilled at facilitating higher order thinking and creative thinking.

## **School Options**

- ▶ **Self-directed learning;** Westmere School's pedagogy and approach to the curriculum provides support for all students, while also supporting gifted students, particularly twice exceptional learners. Their development of modern learning environments are occurring alongside a pedagogical change to teaching. Teachers are collaborating, planning and delivering a curriculum in learning studios of 3 teachers that emphasises both personalised and student self-directed learning. Children could explain how they can determine their own next step learning goals; self-select the learning tasks to meet these and opt in to learning clinics, moving onto their own independent learning once they've gained the skills and knowledge they need to be able to work independently. This provides both open ended challenge and removes the need for learners to sit through teaching sessions on learning they already have an understanding in, allowing children to set the pace of their learning. They also have access to more than one teacher and teaching style. Alongside self-assessment, both peers and teachers provide feedback on learning progress and achievement. Children can choose their preferred type of learning space; gifted learners, particularly the twice exceptional learners, responded to the opportunity to move around and select where and how they would work, collaboratively or independently.
- ▶ **Clustering** gifted children with teachers that 'Get them' and enjoy finding ways of working with these learners was a further example of how Westmere school was catering for their gifted and twice exceptional learners, providing an opportunity for them to work with 'like- minded' others. The gifted learners clustered together provide some interesting behaviour dynamics in the class but also some really positive dynamics, diverse thinking and ways of viewing things that the rest of the class gain from. The teacher tries to get them to be in control of their own learning, giving planned choice which works well for some, however for others they need structure and scaffolded support.

- ▶ **GATE teacher;** A designated experienced and passionate fulltime GATE teacher is used at Ponsonby primary to meet the needs within the school. They have used the parallel curriculum in the past and are currently using an inquiry approach. A rigorous 7 step identification screening programme, which is continually being reviewed and updated, is used by the school. Parent information meetings are held each year with information about gifted provision. The GATE teacher has parent conferences twice a year, provides written reporting and keeps a detailed individual cumulative file of learning and progress. Children from Year 3 on have access to the gifted Inquiry programme. The GATE teacher works with identified gifted learners during a learning block, 3 times per week, linking the Inquiry topic to what the children are doing in their main stream class; children can then carry on with their work during the rest of the week. The GATE teacher also works as part of the teaching teams when they are cross grouping e.g. in Maths, and provides a range of exciting talent development initiatives, utilising outside experts. Children have access to a range of competitions and challenges e.g. Vector technology challenge.
- ▶ **ICT;** A range of technology was being used as tools to support gifted and talented children. Ponsonby were using the Virtual classroom and discussion boards, e.g. Edmodo, which have been a useful vehicle to allow student voice.

## **Withdrawal options**

### ▶ **Cluster schools;**

Ponsonby primary has coordinated a successful cluster school model until 2013, which evolved from an MOE talent development initiative. This approach needs buy in from the schools. 3 children from each school could attend. Teachers could be released from their schools to run a TDI (talent development initiative) in areas of passion and expertise, with much of the programme provided by the GATE teacher at Ponsonby. Outside experts were utilised for TDI's e.g in Sports and Forensics. One of the real benefits was seen as diversity; Children from different cultures and socio economic areas building relationships and having opportunities to work together with like-minded learners.

Dr Kate Niederer shared a slightly different cluster model that a group of 5 schools in Cheshire England set up following a presentation she gave at Warwick University about the One day school model. They agreed to collectively fund both a teacher for one day a week and the resources needed. One school made a class space available. They developed and shared identification processes and decided to focus particularly on Maths and Science as those were the areas their children needed most. Children attended that most fitted the identification profile rather than an allocation of a number of students per school.

One Day school, Small Poppies, Gifted Online and Gifted kids all rely on sponsorship to part fund their programmes. They have recently merged and begun curriculum alignment work so that they are no longer competing for the same funding pools and remain viable in the future. The programmes, (see below), are as they are currently operating until their review and curriculum alignment and development is completed. They hope to have this completed and in place for 2015.

### ▶ **One Day School**

One day School is an option used by some gifted learners in one school I visited. Some children have been at the One Day School for some time and enjoy this opportunity to work with other 'like-minded' learners. Others had attended One Day School for a few terms and then returned to mainstream school full time as they didn't like missing out on what was happening in their home school. One Year 6 boy explained the programme and how he spent his day. He liked the creative opportunities the One Day School programme provided, which he said encouraged him to 'think outside the box'. There are learning themes/ topics with a range of options provided, however he had the freedom to negotiate and choose an individual direction if it loosely connected to the theme and gave a good example of this. The children's teacher felt they responded to the programme, which required less writing, and enjoyed the experiments, talking and creating.

Talking with the class teacher of a group of twice exceptional gifted children clustered in her class, she explained that although the children liked familiarity and routine, the One Day School became part of their routine and after a few weeks they settled into this well. Weekly reports on the One Day School programme are provided for the mainstream class teacher; however this is not individualised and does not provide information on what each child has engaged in. Parents see One Day School as supporting both their child and their school teacher. Some schools and teachers are more open and accepting of One Day School than others. Being supportive by taking an interest in what the child is doing at One Day School and not asking children to catch up on all work they've missed can make a real difference for One Day School children.

I had the privilege of attending One Day Schools in action and can see how this benefits the gifted child, providing a programme working with 'like minded' peers that would be difficult to replicate in mainstream schools, particularly in our region where we have smaller school sizes. Giftedness is celebrated. One Day School use the Clinton Golding books, and focus on a conceptual curriculum. The teachers develop and extensively plan a daily plan around a the term's concept. They meet each term to plan collaboratively, can use an online forum to post ideas and thinking related to the concept for the term but also have autonomy to be responsive to their group of learners. During my visits the concept for the term was 'Reality' and the theme on one of the days was 'Imagination', in another school 'Creative advertising'. Questions to be explored were posted for the children to consider and ponder on prior to and during the day. The day began with 'opening the mind' questions; *think/ reason/ discuss* followed by a range of introductory activities that all children completed. Higher order thinking, language and questioning was a feature of the children's discussions, with the teacher providing open ended feedback and prompts to extend the thinking further. Most children actively contributed and interacted with others in the introductory activities. Children were then given activities and choices from: *Read/ Research/ Explore, Make/ Do/Create* and *Think/ reason/ Discuss*. Of particular note was the pace at which the children worked. I originally thought the planning and number of choices was too extensive to be achieved in a day but observed a number of children race through the options, completing a huge workload. Teachers are aware that a gifted child may need only 1-3 repetitions to take on new learning where most learners need 7-12 repetitions. The children were comfortable and respectful of each other and the teacher. They enjoyed talking and interacting in pairs or small groups and at times independently, while working. They ate as they wanted to and most continued with activities through morning and lunch breaks. The day finishes with a short evaluation of the day.

Children attending One day School need to have a psychological assessment alongside parent and teacher completed nomination forms and an interview with the child. The teachers find the psychological assessment information invaluable. The strengths and weaknesses identified help the teacher when planning and considering adaptation of tasks. The focus first is on the positives and strengths. A number of twice exceptional learners access the One Day School programme. Parents pay for each session, which is subsidised by grants and sponsorship.

### ▶ **Small Poppies**

Small Poppies is a group designed specifically to meet the needs of young gifted children and their parents. It provides an enrichment and extension programme that allows gifted children to work at their own pace and level, with children of similar abilities and with similar interests. It also provides an opportunity for parents to meet and network with others facing similar parenting challenges. Emphasis is placed on stimulating the child's learning process, rather than on achieving any specific end result or product. Small Poppies children come from all backgrounds and can attend sessions from the age of two until they turn six. Class sizes are small, with up to 12 children enrolled. Sessions last 2½ hours, consisting of teacher-directed activities and time for children to independently explore activities. It offers children an environment in which it is safe to be themselves and in which their ideas will be understood and valued. Referral can be by parents, doctor, and extended family. Parents complete an identification questionnaire and then attend a group interview session; Poppy Peek. This group interview gives parents and children a chance to look at the programme and for the teacher to see if the child would benefit from Small Poppies. .

I was fortunate to attend a Small Poppies session. The group at this session varied in age from 4 to nearly 6. Parents stayed and were actively involved in the session. Siblings were welcomed and joined in activities. Some children attended more than one session per week. Parents are informed by email about the topic/themes for the term that they can build on with their children, covering areas such as technology, history, geography, fantasy, with an emphasis on science. The teacher chooses the first themes and then gets feedback on children's interests for later themes in the term. The skills of predicting and estimating are emphasised. They also focus on teaching independence, manners and socialising skills and activities that include purposeful fine motor skills. The theme for the day was 'Time'. A wide range of activities and resources were used. As seen at One Day School sessions, children picked up new learning quickly, brought a wide range of knowledge and prior experiences to the discussions, responded to higher order questioning and were very engaged throughout the session. Parents spoken to had travelled some distance to attend the session as they felt it made a real difference for their children. As parents participate in the session they are the conduit to share the day's programme & learning with their child's pre-school or class teacher.

### ▶ **Gifted Kids One Day School Programme**

Children come to Gifted Kids One Day School each week from a cluster of schools that help to fund the programme. Parents also make a donation from what they can afford, alongside outside funding and sponsorship. In the referral process, parents and the school complete a questionnaire. Children then attend a half day workshop where a range of assessments, tasks and discussions are carried out that are observed by the Gifted Kids teaching team, who decide if the programme will support the referred children. A psychological assessment is only suggested to parents if the Gifted Kids teacher feels it is needed for more information,

such as for twice exceptional students. Gifted Kids was originally set up for low decile schools, however this has changed somewhat as the socio economic status of some schools has changed. Children benefit from mixing with children from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Class size is usually 12 to 16 children. Fortnightly updates are sent to schools and parents to inform them on what is happening at Gifted Kids One Day School sessions and they have an opportunity to come to an 'event' each term. Participating schools have access to professional development in GATE and an e-resource of the tools being used.

The Gifted Kids curriculum has three strands to it; the talent development, the conceptual development and the personal development strands. The personal development strand is particularly focussed on the social and emotional development and needs of gifted children. The programme has a concept for the year, run on a four year cycle; Change, Systems, Patterns and Discovery. The first term is spent doing introductory work around the concept. The second and third terms are spent looking at the concept through particular contexts and in the fourth term the teacher has autonomy to choose another context or allow children to undertake their own inquiry. Children learn about the concept through the lens of the context. This year the concept is Discovery. Planning is very detailed and extensive, with concept units developed by the teachers and then shared across the Gifted Kid's network. Sandra Kaplin's Depth of complexity framework; 8 depth tools and 3 complexity tools are used to provide rigour and depth in children's thinking and work. These can be transferable and used in our mainstream schools. Differentiation is carefully considered and planned for in concept development, task complexity and resources.

I was fortunate to observe a Gifted Kids session for twelve Year 6 to 8 children. The children had spent the morning on a robotics workshop following a visit to Mindlab in Auckland; a slightly different morning to their usual format. An 'expert' parent was supporting this work. Children write a talent vision during the first term of the year and set goals each term they want to achieve. The afternoon part of the day was given to talent time; working on individual areas of passion or skill. Some children were working with others in a shared 'passion' area and others individually. All were highly engaged in their work.

## ► Gifted Online

Gifted Online (GO) is run through the New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education by lead teacher Mary St George. Go Solo is offered to individuals and Go Team is an option a school can use for gifted children within their school. Also available are GO story makers and GO graphics. Children are enrolled in Gifted Online from across NZ, particularly from regional and rural areas, as well as some children from overseas and in Australia. Children pay a fee, which is once again subsidised by grants and sponsorship. It can be a more affordable option for some children than One Day School. Mary talks about each student being part of 'a community of learners', which includes their parents. She is passionate about her work and when sharing the learning of her GO students.

Mary sees "the size of the step up 'that gifted GO students can take individually and in a small group can be more than can be achieved in a main stream classroom of mixed ability students. Mary develops work for students around a concept each half year. Portfolios are kept online for each student where Mary posts the learning options and instructions, and where the student can upload work, photos and videos. The portfolio can be seen by other GO

children and their teachers. GO children are encouraged to read and post comments on each other's work.

They are asked to do a reflection at least twice a term. Mary uses a reflection tool that she has adapted from one of the health sciences, SOAP; Subject; why did you select the task? How did you go on this task? Objective, what's measurable and provable? Assessment, Planner. Share strengths, but only one weakness, to address in future work. This reflection is completed with Mary in a guided group reflection session and is a key area of assessment. Mary provides options for gifted children with different needs to access the online content. For example, she provides them with plug ins, such as safari, that can 'read' the text. Tasks include a variety of options for different learner needs such as video, cartooning and 'hands on' tasks. Children can select the tasks that suit them, including decisions on tasks where they have access to sufficient resources.

GO story makers is for children who are passionate writers. It is not so much for teaching writing but more about creating a venue for writers to bounce ideas off each other. It was inspired by GO students saying they weren't often able to write imaginatively in their mainstream schools. GO story makers get together online on Fridays for a skype chat and to share and discuss their writing. They are looking at each other's writing with interest and starting to compare authors and styles. They also do a 10 minute writing burst during the session.

Go Teams in a school works best with a minimum of 3 (unless a 1 teacher school) and maximum of about 7 when starting out. The school teacher that is supporting these learners is asked to participate in the hour long weekly skype chat and commit a further half hour in the week to talk with the students on what they're working on, what resources they might need, providing feedback and encouragement to keep on track. It can be easier to start with children you are confident in as gifted learners that are working at a similar level to get processes in place before branching out to include other gifted learners across the school.

GO requires a big reading and writing load alongside the students planning their own work. This can make the GO option more difficult for younger gifted children. People on line can also seem more abstract to some younger gifted children.

Mary has seen many good examples of school, teacher and parent support for GO. Some referrals are now also beginning to come from RTLB.

## Student Voice

Children's views gathered during my visits on what we could do better in our schools to cater for gifted children were;

- ▶ Provide more opportunities to think creatively
- ▶ More choice in what they learn and how they learn it
- ▶ Letting teachers know that Gifted Kids aren't good at absolutely everything; "we might be gifted in just one or two areas and teachers have expectations that we should excel in everything". *Quote from a GO student.*
- ▶ Learn more about how to cater for a gifted child
- ▶ Provide time and opportunities to develop their passion in area of talent(s)
- ▶ More opportunity for independent learning; less time sitting through class lessons going over learning, multiple times, that they already know.

'*Why fit in when you're born to stand out*' Dr Seuss. A quote a One Day School student shared with me that fits for him and his view on himself as a learner.

## Options in Taranaki

Our local NZAGC group, Taranaki Explorers, has been recently formed by 3 interested parents and now has a membership of 20 families with children ranging from 2 to 13 years old. The group meets once a month. They organise a range of opportunities for the children in weekends and holidays, utilising local expertise from within and beyond the group. They feel gifted children are underserved in our region, particularly with opportunities to work with 'like-minded' others. A few children are enrolled in the Gifted on Line programme, where they can complete work at home and school. The amount of engagement depends on the topic and also the organisational skills of the child. Parents found the GO programme works better for some children than others. They are currently working hard to set up a One Day School in New Plymouth to provide the face to face opportunity they would like for their children to socialise and work with other 'like-minded' children. They have a local Intermediate school prepared to host a One Day School, however this is proving difficult now that The NZ centre for Gifted Education and Gifted Kids Associations have just amalgamated. The new organisation may not be able to support setting up a new One Day School in the immediate future until they have their new systems, processes and curriculum in place. The local group have also found some parents are reluctant to commit to One Day School without seeing it in operation and are not sure what support they will have from their local schools. They are now considering, in the interim, a self-funded option, with a school providing a class room where the children can work together with the support of a designated teacher employed by the group. They are also looking to utilise local 'experts' in the wider community.

### **A Survey to schools in the New Plymouth Principals Association provided the following results of what is available locally.**

#### **School Profile respondents**

- ▶ 57% Contributing primary schools Years 1-6
- ▶ 29% Full primary schools Years 1-8
- ▶ 14% Intermediate schools Years 7-8

Respondents were from a range of urban and rural settings, from U1 to U5 in school size. NB: The survey response of 14 schools makes this a small representative sample.

#### **1. How does your school currently cater for Gifted and Talented learners within your school?**

<b>An inclusive and appropriate definition and identification process for gifted and talented students</b>	<b>33.33%</b>
<b>A current gifted and talented register</b>	<b>41.67%</b>
	<b>8.33%</b>

<b>Staff professional development in catering for Gifted &amp; Talented students</b>	
Teachers are aware of / use MoE sites, such as <a href="http://gifted.tki.org.nz/">http://gifted.tki.org.nz/</a>	33.33%
<b>The learning programme is differentiated within the class</b>	83.33%
<b>GATE opportunities beyond the class programme are provided within the school</b>	25.00%
<b>Access to digital on line learning</b>	50.00%
<b>Cultural Considerations/Relevance (Particularly for Maori/Pasifika)</b>	8.33%
<b>Assessment of giftedness by educational psychologist/other</b>	0%

## 2. Which, if any, of these options are you using to cater for Gifted and Talented students in your school?

- ▶ Access to Gifted Online programme 10.00%
- ▶ Opportunity to work with like-minded “others” 70.00%
- ▶ GATE programme - cluster with other school(s) 10.00%
- ▶ GATE opportunities with local Intermediate or Secondary School 0.00%
- ▶ Access to Advanced Resources e.g Input from “Experts” “Real Practitioners 40.00%
- ▶ One day School 0.00%

## 3. What is currently working successfully for your gifted and talented students

The two Intermediate Schools outlined a range of opportunities currently working for their gifted Year 7 & 8 students;

- ▶ Access to the Virtual Learning Network, Differentiated programmes, Higher order thinking frameworks - Blooms, questioning frameworks, Part time teacher hours to work on specific extension programmes - e.g. debating.
- ▶ An academy structure. We have an academic academy for those who are academically able and Science/Tech, Creative Arts and Sports Academies to cater for other areas of giftedness. We also have a part time teacher employed for 0.1 to provide programmes such as Philosophy for Children. We run a weekly enrichment programme offering a wide range of activities/programmes for students to opt into. The One Day School that is currently being established will be based at our school.

Primary School respondents provided a range of responses on what was currently working for their gifted students including;

- ▶ Differentiated classroom programmes.
- ▶ Withdrawal groups.
- ▶ Participation in special opportunities programmes.
- ▶ Individual I pads
- ▶ Using Google Docs Blogs
- ▶ Inquiry Learning
- ▶ Feeding back to others; taking their knowledge to lead/teach other learners.
- ▶ Online programmes in maths that progress according to ability.
- ▶ Use of thinking tools such as SOLO to provide more complexity to set tasks
- ▶ Leadership opportunities and access to competitions e.g Science Fair.
- ▶ Acceleration - e.g. for Maths, Literacy to an older class

- ▶ Access to local experts e.g. D.O.C, IPENZ  
One respondent said they had no gifted or talented students at the moment.

#### 4. What challenges do you currently face in meeting the needs of Gifted and talented learners?

Not all respondents answered this question. Of those that did the most common response referred to the current emphasis on priority learners and National standards targeting children who are below/well below which they felt has pushed the needs of Gifted & Talented students into the background a bit.

Also mentioned was

- ▶ Lack of resources and space.
- ▶ Identification of gifted students
- ▶ Funding and resources to deliver programmes for gifted students
- ▶ Time to develop specific learning programmes.
- ▶ Making time for Staff Professional Development in GATE
- ▶ No local Gifted & Talented Advisory or funded access to Educational Psychologist Assessments
- ▶ No one day school in area
- ▶ Making suitable links beyond the school

#### 5. Are you familiar with what the local Taranaki Explorers club offers for Gifted students and their families? (The Taranaki Explorers club is a recently established regional branch of the NZAGC)

- ▶ YES; 18% responded NO; 73% UNSURE; 9%

#### 6. Would you be interested in any of the following options?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Professional development locally to meet the needs of Gifted and Talented students	90.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Clustering with another school (s) to provide a GATE programme	81.82%	18.18%	0.00%
Using the Gifted on line programme	90.00%	0.00%	10.00%
Having a One Day school option in New Plymouth	70.00%	10.00%	20.00%

### Implications

- ▶ Professional development is essential in meeting the needs of gifted learners and an area our region could benefit from further. School clustering could make this a more affordable and viable option. The GATE learning communities' model could be brought to our region if we have enough schools interested.
- ▶ If gifted children's needs aren't catered for in our schools as well as they could be, the positive characteristics associated with gifted children are more likely to be replaced by negative behaviours that can also be associated with gifted children. Sometimes the twice exceptional students can be the most highly gifted. Have we got robust identification processes to recognise the giftedness in these students who may be presenting with

learning difficulties and behaviours in our schooling system? Gifted Online could be something our RTLBs and SENCOs could consider when planning an IEP for a gifted twice exceptional child, where One Day School is not available.

- ▶ Resources and tools which have been researched and used by One Day School and Gifted Kids could be transferable and used in our mainstream schools e.g. Sandra Kaplin's depth of complexity framework.
- ▶ Are we testing high enough to see if we're accelerating gifted learners? National standards don't highlight our gifted learners. There is potential for our gifted students to 'flat line' and not make the accelerated progress we expect of other learners. Above level testing and providing regular high level challenge in classrooms need to be considered and used in our schools as ways of better catering for our gifted and talented children.
- ▶ Student voice and parent/ whanau voice should be integral in guiding our school review process.
- ▶ Improved communication is needed between our local parent NZAGC group and schools in our region. Schools can assist gifted children and their families locally by sharing information with our school communities via our newsletters and websites on meetings, activities and programmes being offered by this Association.
- ▶ The evidence from New Zealand-based research shows that currently gifted students tend to be under-served by many schools in the education system, with certain groups, including Māori, often overlooked. We need to engage with whanau and utilise the research and examples of good practice available on how we can better meet the needs of our priority learners.
- ▶ Gifted children need opportunities to work and socialize with like-minded others; where One Day School is not available, school clustering, Gifted Online or other options need to be considered.
- ▶ Schools and teachers can make a difference just by letting gifted children know that we see the ability they have in them.

## Conclusions

Schools are required to identify their gifted and talented students and to develop classroom and school-wide programmes to meet their needs. School self-review, in partnership with the school community, is the best place to start when looking to improve our GATE provision and the effectiveness of this. Facilitation by outside 'expert' providers can strengthen the review process.

It is important that outside of the main cities, gifted and talented students have access to programmes and support that caters for their individual needs. If parents feel they have to move to have the needs of their gifted child met, provincial cities and towns lose families that are contributing to the successes of these communities.

"In New Zealand, gifted learners are found in every classroom and across all cultures and

socio-economic groups. They are children who, with the right support and guidance, go on to contribute in a range of important areas of New Zealand society.”

Hon. Steve Maharey, former Minister of Education Welcome to conference delegates at *Rising Tides: Nurturing Our Gifted Culture*, 2006

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