
To Investigate the Identification of and Provision for Gifted Students, with a particular focus on Maori Giftedness

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Sabbatical Report

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank the West Gore School Board of Trustees for supporting my application and sabbatical leave. Special thanks to Cathi Knowles, Deputy Principal, and Jenny Stearn, Assistant Principal, for continuing our work in my absence.

Thank you to the Principals and teachers who welcomed me into their schools and openly shared their journey with me. I am very grateful for your time and expertise in helping develop my knowledge and understanding of gifted education.

I wish to acknowledge the Ministry of Education and the NZEI for the sabbatical leave provision for Principals. I appreciate the opportunity to reflect on an aspect of practise and gain valuable insight and knowledge from other professionals. Time to enjoy some personal reflection and rest, away from the daily demands of Principalship, is a rare gift.

Introduction:

The National Education Guidelines (NEGs) require schools to assist students to realise their full potential, to identify and remove barriers to achievement, and to identify and support those students with special needs. The National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) require all schools to identify Gifted and Talented students and to develop and implement teaching and learning strategies to meet those needs.

While these are worthy statements of principle, in practice, Gifted and Talented education is still overlooked in many settings, despite the concept of giftedness having widespread acceptance. Whereas, cultural giftedness does not appear to be widely recognised nor provided for.

The question to ask is 'are we identifying and providing for areas of giftedness in our schools through the lens of differing cultural understandings and characteristics?' Or, are we much more likely to identify, interpret and provide for giftedness from a majority viewpoint?

At the heart of successful education for all Maori students is the provision of a culturally responsive environment. This is the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture and of those from other cultures. Students will be better able to successfully participate and engage in learning on their own culturally informed terms. This allows our students to feel valued and increases their self-esteem because they are given "positive feelings about their worth as individuals and as productive members in their classroom" (Montgomery, 2001). Unless we fully understand, and can provide a culturally responsive environment, we are unlikely to truly comprehend what Maori giftedness is.

Purpose:

To develop a wider knowledge and understanding to allow students who are currently underachieving to be identified in appropriate ways, and have effective programmes within our school to ensure educational success for all students, including Maori and non-Maori.

This will be achieved by the following methods:

- Reading current New Zealand research from J. Bevan-Brown, K. Neiderer, A. Macfarlane, T. Riley, J. Hattie and exploring the wealth of information on TKI Gifted and Talented Online to develop a deeper level of understanding about identification and provision for learners.
- Observing in schools in Auckland with the support of Kate Neiderer & Viv Russell, Cognition Education, where they have worked with leaders to develop effective identification processes and provision for a large variety of

gifted learners & schools in Christchurch offering effective programmes for Gifted and Talented students.

- Collect data from students
- Discuss with school leaders, in the schools visited, identification guidelines for teachers, students/peers, parents/whanau that would be useful in our school for both Non-Maori and Maori learners
- Discuss the link between identification documentation, observable characteristics in students and provision
- Begin to explore methods of programme provision and strategies for providing differentiated learning experiences that enrich and accelerate learning for gifted and talented students based on my readings, observations and discussions in the schools visited in Auckland & Christchurch

Background & Rational:

We are at the beginning of our journey in gifted education and have identified a significant need to cater for students in our school, many of whom are underachieving because of our lack of knowledge and provision.

We acknowledge our Maori learners require us to look through a different lens in identification and provision.

West Gore School, our contributing Intermediate School, and a contributing year 7 – 13 school, have undertaken professional development in gifted and talented education with Kate Niederer, Cognition Education. The partnership with our contributing schools ensures our students' needs will be met now and in the future.

We are relatively isolated in terms of professional development and being able to access a variety of models of good practice in gifted education, and in particular gifted Maori students, has been a challenge. Learning from colleagues through observation, discussion, research and documentation has been vital in gaining a full understanding of giftedness and then developing a planned approach.

West Gore School undertook a Ministry SAF project in the second half of 2012 with a focus on Raising Maori student achievement. This is still an important strategic goal for our Board of Trustees which this project supported.

The opportunity to participate in this professional development means I will have increased knowledge and confidence to lead learning in gifted education within our school.

We have undertaken a variety of programmes within our school over several years but they have had little success and have been difficult to sustain.

Key Understandings

Key understandings that I wish to validate/ explore during my sabbatical:

- Identification and provision for gifted and talented students is a requirement of NAG 1 in many schools, including ours, where there is a lack of knowledge of how to go about this.
- Many Principals believe they do not have gifted and talented students in their school because of their definition of giftedness i.e. top 10%, or limited to a single criterion
- Gifted and talented students in our school can be under achieving and often bored within their class
- Parents of Gifted and Talented students know what their children need within school and have frustrations their needs are not being met by the school or their child's teachers
- Teachers often disagree with parents on whether a child is gifted
- Gifted students usually have gifted parents
- Traditional test results often don't show gifts and talents
- There is a difference between 'bright ' students and gifted and talented students
- Gifted and Talented students are vastly different from each other
- Like minds enjoy working together
- Gifted students know they are different from their peers and are often unhappy, have anxieties, can have other learning disabilities, perfectionist tendencies
- Don't always score well on tests, may not be the children teachers identify

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- Girls are more difficult to identify as they progress through the school; they follow social norms more readily than boys therefore do not show their giftedness
 - Gifted students who have not been identified and well catered for could be more at risk of mental illness, depression, low self-esteem and a sense of hopelessness as they get older.
 - A students' peer group are often able to identify gifted traits and talents i.e. they think differently, achieve well.
 - Gifted students may not be gifted in all areas, but have particular areas of strength or interest

Methodology:

Learning activities undertaken included:

Reading and reviewing relevant resources and literature:

- TKI Gifted and Talented, with a particular focus on the teachers section, identification and provision and cultural aspects.
- Jill Bevan-Browns work , particularly “Identifying and Providing for Gifted and Talented Maori Students” (2009)
- Visiting and discussing my area of study with Kate Neiderer, Cognition Education
- Visiting a variety of schools in Auckland and Christchurch who have a strong focus on Gifted Education and discussing with Principals and teachers involved in providing for G& T students.
- Interviewing a variety of students within West Gore and other schools to gain a deeper understanding of how students who have special gifts and talents think and want their needs meet within school
- Discussing with parents of gifted students to gain a deeper understanding of needs of their children in a school setting.

Concepts and Definitions:

What is Giftedness?

It is necessary to gain a common understanding of what it means to be gifted. From discussions with colleagues there is a lot of confusion about what 'gifted and talented' means within individual schools. Conservative definitions are usually based on a single criterion, such as academic intelligence, limiting giftedness to the top 1 – 3%. This narrow focus potentially means a significant number of students are not being identified and provided for because of the bar being set to high. Popular multi-categorical concepts of giftedness include abilities such as intellectual, academic and physical, leadership, creativity, the visual and performing arts and so forth.

Giftedness is, however, “dynamic, malleable” (Tapper, 2012) and the “very nature of talent itself is constantly changing” (Tapper, 2012). There is no common definition of what giftedness is in New Zealand, no specific formula for defining and measuring what is gifted and what is not.

The Education Review Office Report, *Schools' Provisions for Gifted and Talented Students* (ERO, 2008) states that when reviewing policy around definitions of giftedness and talent in schools they were looking for evidence that “...the school's definition of giftedness and talent reflected the context and values of the school community, was multi-categorical, incorporated Maori concepts, incorporated multi-cultural concepts and was grounded in sound research and theory.”

In the Ministry of Education's policy statement, *Initiatives for Gifted and Talented Learners (2002a)*, they make the following points:

- Gifted and talented learners are those with exceptional abilities relative to most other people of similar age
- Those individuals have certain learning characteristics that give them the potential to achieve outstanding performance
- Giftedness and talent can mean different things to different communities and cultures in new Zealand

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- Students who exhibit characteristics of giftedness or talent have learning needs that are significantly different from those of other children
 - They require different opportunities and may need emotional and social support to realise their potential

The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (Gagne, 2009) is also a useful guide to redirecting the current emphasis on a narrow focus or single criterion. Gagne designates giftedness as “the possession and use of outstanding natural abilities, called aptitudes, in at least one abilities domain, to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers.” (Gagne, 2009)

He distinguishes talent as “the outstanding mastery of systemically developed abilities, called competencies (knowledge and skills) in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers who are or have been active in that field.” (Gagne, 2009)

In simple terms he differentiates giftedness as raw capacity and talent as developed ability. Gages differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) can be found on the TKI Gifted and Talented site and is explained in greater detail.

The top 10% gives a good guide and can be equated with standardised tests in academic areas of the curriculum. In other areas it is more difficult to determine where your particular student fits across a national cohort of students. I believe teachers and Principals can identify exceptional talent when they see it across a wide variety of areas and need to trust their professional judgement in this area.

Findings:

What do we need to know about identification of Maori and Non Maori students?

Defining who are the gifted and talented in a school is not an easy task. A school must first arrive at a definition; this provides the basis for identification and for deciding how to provide for these students.

The gifted and talented are not a homogeneous group, and every student possesses a unique blend of traits. However, when we look at gifted and talented students as a group, we can see clusters of common characteristics. As definitions of giftedness have broadened, so too have the categories of characteristics. Each school needs to develop a set of characteristics that reflects its definition of and approach to giftedness and talent. This then becomes a resource for identifying those students who would benefit from the school's gifted and talented programme.

It is certainly the case within New Zealand that certain specific talents are commonly targeted within gifted education initiatives, and that these areas of ability are limited in scope. If we pay attention to the broader range of abilities, then we will be more successful at identifying and providing for a greater number of gifted and talented children.

The Ministry of Education (2012) has identified five categories students may show gifted and talented characteristics - learning, creative thinking, motivational, social leadership and self-determination. These are a useful starting point. However, Maureen Neihart and George Betts (2010) have created profiles of characteristics to aid identification for Maori and Non-Maori gifted and talented learners.

Non- Maori Profiles of Gifted and Talented

There are six profiles identified by Maureen Neihart and George Betts (2010) that are very helpful in thinking about the complexity of this group of learners.

In summary they are characterised by the following feelings, attitudes and behaviours:

The Successful: complacent, dependent, good academic self-concept, fear of failure, extrinsic motivation, self-critical, works for the grade, unsure about the future, eager for approval, achieves, seeks teacher approval, avoids risk, accepts and conforms, chooses safe activities, gets good grades, consumer of information.

The Creative: highly creative, bored and frustrated, fluctuating self-esteem, impatient and defensive, heightened sensitivity, uncertain about social roles,

high energy, may be in conflict with peers, stand up for convictions, may have poor self- control, questions rules, expressed impulses, is honest and direct.

The Underground: desire to belong socially, conflicted, guilty and insecure, unsure of their right to their emotions, diminished sense of self, ambivalent about achievement, devalue, discount or deny talent, drops out of G7T classes, rejects challenges, moves form one peer group to the other, not connected to the teacher or class, unsure of direction.

The At-Risk: resentful and angry, depressed, reckless and manipulative, poor self- concept, unaccepted, not motivated by teacher driven rewards, creates crises and causes disruption, thrill seeking, will work for the relationship, pursues outside interest, low academic achievement, may be self-isolating, often creative, criticises self and others, produces inconsistent work

Twice Exceptional (2E): learned helplessness, intense frustration and anger, mood disorders, prone to discouragement, poor academic concept. don't know where to belong, don't see themselves as successful, makes connections easily, seems average or below, seems young in social/emotional maturity, may be disruptive or off-task, disorganised, good problem solvers, may not cope with gifted peer group,

Autonomous Learner: self-confident, self-accepting, optimistic, intrinsically motivated, ambitious and excited, may not view academics as highest priority, shows tolerance and respect for others, appropriate work skills, works independently, set SMART goals, seek challenge, strongly self- directed, stand up for convictions, producer of knowledge, possesses understanding and acceptance of self.

Maori Profiles of Gifted and Talented

The Government's core principles of gifted education particularly for Maori students is that, "Maori perspectives and values must be embodied in all aspects of definition, identification and provision for gifted and talented students." This principle is not being adhered to in many schools because of a lack of understanding of what this

actually means. Cultural stereotyping is a potential barrier. Most of our teachers are white, middle class and in the main do not have enough deep understanding of things Maori to identify giftedness or talents in our Maori students.

Jill Bevan Brown (2009) has written about this and provides some very useful insight into identification and provision within our schools. The identification of a Maori and Non Maori student needs to be made through different lenses. She identifies five cultural lenses that must be considered. They are:

Provision: How can gifted students be provided for in a culturally appropriate way?

Identification: What are culturally appropriate identification methods?

Priority: What priority is given to each area of giftedness?

Interpretation: How is each area of giftedness perceived and demonstrated?

Areas: In what areas is giftedness recognised?

Maureen Neihart & George Betts, 2010 have identified profiles of Maori giftedness, identifying the following areas:

Manaakitanga: generosity- honouring, caring and giving mana to people thus honouring your own, integrity and mana

Whanaungatanga: family values, relationships; form strength and maintain bonds with peers, promote loyalty and inclusiveness, aware of responsibility, especially in relationship with others

Wairuatanga: balance, harmony, spirituality, being grounded, calm, sensitive and reflective thinker, heart of humility which is open and giving

Kaitiakitanga: caretaker/guardianship of knowledge, environment and resources, recognises that human welfare and care for the environment are inextricably linked.

Rangatiratanga: (Ranga- to weave, tira- a company) - leadership that inspires unity; have mana amongst their peers

Matauranga: knowledge-intellect, thinking skills, wisdom, education, learned; intrinsic motivation and persistence to seek new knowledge.

Tikanga: approved etiquette, correct behaviour, truthful, proper, respectful; knowledge of protocols, customs, and rituals that demonstrate and reinforce values and beliefs.

Jill Bevan Brown (2005) challenges our thinking about whether or not we are actually providing opportunities for our students who are gifted in cultural areas to be extended and recognised. Does developing excellence in these areas receive the same priority, status, funding and time commitment as developing excellence in academic subjects?

We need to not only think about giftedness in cultural skills, abilities and knowledge but in cultural values and qualities. Some qualities that have been identified include awhinatanga and whakaritenga mahi (helping and serving others), maia (courage and bravery), manaakitanga (hospitality), wairuatanga (spirituality), whanaungatanga (familiness), aroha-ki-te-tangata and tutohutanga (love for, caring and sensitivity to others), pukumahi and pukeku (industriousness and determination). (Bevan-Brown, 2002).

Providing for Maori students who are gifted in cultural values and qualities is just as important as focusing on academically intelligences. Some other characteristics/indicators to consider are: (Bevan-Brown, J.M. (2009)

- Communicates in Te Reo Maori clearly, fluently and flexibly using a variety of advanced language structures and figures of speech
- Can compose, deliver and respond to a karanga, karakia, mihimihi or whaikorero appropriate to the occasion and audience
- Has a broad knowledge of Maori, iwi and hapu history and Tikanga.
- Has in depth knowledge of a particular iwi or hapū including their history, tikanga, dialect, and whakatauākī;
- Has a broad knowledge of Māori mythology and can interpret myth messages in a contemporary context;
- Demonstrates advanced practical and creative ability in some form of Māori art or craft; eg, carving, weaving;

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- Demonstrates advanced performing and creative ability in some form of Māori music; eg, composes contemporary waiata and haka, has an extensive repertoire of traditional waiata;
 - Displays advanced ability in Māori games, pastimes and practices; eg, taiaha expertise;
 - Has a keen interest in and wide knowledge of whānau, hapū, and iwi whakapapa;
 - Has a deep appreciation of traditional Māori values such as manaakitanga and whanaungatanga and embodies these in word and action;
 - Has advanced spiritual understanding, perception, appreciation, and ability (wairuatanga) and knowledge of traditional and contemporary karakia;
 - Has in depth knowledge of traditional healing principles and practices;
 - Possesses a strong sense of Māori identity and incorporates cultural content and allusion in many fields of endeavour;
 - Has a high level of respect for and affinity with kaumātua;
 - Possesses and is accorded a high degree of mana from peers;
 - Has a well-developed sense of altruism and is selfless in service to others.

Bevan-Brown (2009, page 10)

Identifying Students in Culturally Responsive Ways

The Ministry of Education describes two broad areas to identification using a culturally responsive approach. They include:

- (1) **Responsive Environment Approach** where giftedness is encouraged to 'surface' in a stimulating and challenging classroom environment. The key requirements are:
 - (i) Teachers value and support cultural diversity
 - (ii) Programmes incorporate cultural knowledge, skills, practices, experiences, customs, traditions, values, behaviours etc.
 - (iii) Teaching and assessment that utilise culturally preferred ways of learning

At the heart of successful education for all Maori students is the provision of a culturally responsive environment where the “learner’s culture is valued, affirmed and developed” (Bevan-Brown, 2005). Maori students who have a “knowledge of and pride in their Maori culture are more likely to develop their gifted potential” (Bevan-Brown, 1993).

A teacher is able to value a student’s culture and yet not have a detailed knowledge of that culture. However, it is vital to strive to increase cultural understandings in order to provide effectively for our students. Adding cultural content to programmes is an important step but it is not enough. “Cultural values, behaviours and dispositions should also be incorporated” (Bevan-Brown, 2005).

(2) Data Gathering Approach

Identification instruments & strategies such as observations, checklists, rating scales, standardised tests, portfolios, assessment, parent nomination, peer nomination etc.

Standardised Tests, intelligence tests have been widely criticized as a means to identify Maori giftedness. However, tests that have been designed by teachers that understand the cultural perspective and include open ended and divergent questions may achieve the aim of the test. Caution needs to be exercised in these situations.

Schools need to think carefully about their practice in gaining information about their students. It needs to be done in a way that both the students and the parents are seen to be sharing their strengths, interests, future aspirations, concerns, challenges, and preferred learning activities with someone that is genuinely interested in them and their child. The importance of parents in the identification is invaluable. Parents know their children better than anyone else. However, asking parents for direct nominations is less effective as the Maori concept of *whakahihi* (boasting) comes into play.

Kaumatua, whanau and friends outside of school have valuable insight into Maori student’s special gifts. Schools will gain rich and valuable information that will assist in identifying and providing rich experiences for Maori students with gifts and talents.

A strong partnership with local iwi, Marae and whanua will increase rich opportunities for students in schools.

Provision

In the Ministry of Education document, Gifted and Talented: Meeting their needs in New Zealand schools it is noted that “as schools create their guidelines and review their approaches to providing for the gifted and talented, they need to involve the whole school community. A school-wide commitment to catering for the gifted and talented ensures that the impetus for new initiatives and the responsibility for implementation reside with the whole school. Such a shared vision means that programmes for this group of students are more likely to be ongoing and evidence-based, as well as regularly reviewed and improved.”

ERO identified in their 2008 report, Schools’ Provision for Gifted and Talented, five factors that contributed to good quality provision for gifted and talented students:

- identifying and meeting needs;
- reflecting diversity;
- providing challenging in-class provision;
- assessment; and self-review

ERO found a strong correlation between self-review and the programmes and provision for gifted and talented students. The more developed a school’s self-review process, the more responsive and appropriate the programmes and provisions.

The TKI Gifted and Talented Online website provides a wealth of information and resources about enabling gifted and talented students to discover and follow their passions. Acceleration is one possibility for developing abilities. ERO (2008) describes this as “activities that match the readiness and needs of the gifted student. In practice, students are exposed to new content at an earlier age than other children, or cover the same content in less time.” A form of acceleration is ‘curriculum compacting’ where some preliminary school activities may be eliminated or reduced for students who learn at a faster pace. For many gifted student’s repetition of new learning is unnecessary and further practice can cause frustration.

This can be overcome through problem solving activities or stretching thinking through application.

Differentiation is an approach that will benefit all students in all learning contexts. ERO (2008) describes differentiated teaching and learning as “creating multiple paths so that students of different abilities, interest or learning needs experience equally appropriate ways to absorb, use, develop and present concepts as a part of the daily learning process. It allows students to take greater responsibility and ownership for their own learning, and provides opportunities for peer teaching and cooperative learning.”

To fully cater for the needs of gifted students, schools will need to utilise a range of different options both in and out of the regular classroom. As ERO (2008) have already identified “the more developed a school’s self-review process, the more responsive and appropriate the programmes and provisions.” Each year the needs of gifted students within your school will dictate which options you will need to implement.

How can gifted students be provided for in culturally appropriate ways?

The inclusion of Maori content across the curriculum and in programmes specifically designed to extend gifted Maori students is an important step in creating a culturally responsive environment. This means more than having a kapahaka group or including some Te Reo Maori in activities. There are a variety of examples given in Jill Bevan-Browns report on ‘Identifying and Providing for Gifted and Talented Maori students. These examples include participation in Manu Korero speech competitions, studying Maori authors, interviewing kaumatua, creating new taiaha sequences, etc.

Maureen Neihart & George Betts (2010) profiles of Maori giftedness mentioned earlier outline giftedness in relation to personal qualities such as *manaakitanga* (generosity, caring, integrity and mana), *whanaungatanga* (family values, peer bonds, relationships), and *rangatiratanga* (leadership that inspires unity). Within teaching and learning programmes there are many strategies and activities that

provide opportunities for these gifts to emerge and be developed. These include “peer tutoring, tuakana-teina grouping, co-operative learning, peer mediation, hosting visitors to the school and organising powhiri and poroporoaki” (Bevan-Brown, 2009). Other strategies mentioned in the research include examples of activities which involve moral dilemmas, moral reasoning, and role plays, decision-making, exploring social issues, etc. Bevan-Brown’s (1993) research also revealed that “an integral part of a Maori concept of giftedness is the requirement to use one’s gifts and talents in the service of others.”

Conclusion

The purpose of my sabbatical was to ‘investigate the identification and provision for gifted students, with a particular focus on Maori giftedness.’ I have endeavoured to share my knowledge, both new and validated, on identification and provision for gifted and talented students. With these understandings I feel better able to lead learning in gifted education within our school.

I reiterate that at the heart of successful education for all Maori students is the provision of a culturally responsive environment. Unless we fully understand and can provide a culturally responsive environment we are unlikely to truly comprehend what Maori giftedness is. The question that needs to be at the forefront of our thoughts is ‘are we identifying and providing for areas of giftedness in our schools through the lens of differing cultural understandings and characteristics?’

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www.giftedchildren.org.nz The New Zealand Association for Gifted Children (NZAGC)

<http://gifted.tki.org.nz/> Ministry of Education's Gifted and Talented online community