



TARANAKI'S TOKO SCHOOL COLLABORATES

PRINCIPAL GEOFF LOVEGROVE RETIRES

SEVEN VALUES OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS

GIFTED CURRICULUM IN NEW ZEALAND TRAVELLED

Joanne Bate, former Associate Principal at *Gifted Kids*

"SCHOOLS ARE THE first port of call for gifted education in New Zealand and should be offering the most comprehensive approaches to meeting the needs of gifted learners," says Dr Tracy Riley, Associate Professor at Massey University and Trust Board Member at *Gifted Kids*. For this to happen, schools need a written framework for differentiated learning. Tracy warns that without such a framework, provisions for gifted and talented learners may be poorly planned, difficult to evaluate, lacking in rigour and complexity and, ultimately, ineffective.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education suggests that there are three levels of curriculum: national curriculum, the school curriculum, and the classroom curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). It requires schools to develop curriculum that responds to the needs, interests, and talents of individuals and groups of students in their classes.

Over the past ten years, the team of specialist teachers at *Gifted Kids* have been developing a curriculum framework as part of their commitment to providing responsive, differentiated and specialised learning opportunities to the gifted students in their programme. A major review in 2013, resulted in the most recent edition, *Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent*.

This article shares the curriculum-development journey of *Gifted Kids*. *Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent* provides an excellent example of a quality curriculum for gifted and talented learners that schools can draw upon. Their experience provides a successful model for curriculum development which can be used by schools when developing a learning framework for gifted learners.

About *Gifted Kids*:

Gifted Kids is a charitable trust that offers a one-day-a-week withdrawal programme for academically and creatively gifted children in years 2-8. The programme enables students to work with like-minded peers and specialist teachers, over an extended period of time.

What's Happening for Gifted Students in New Zealand Schools?

Research conducted just over a decade ago (Riley, Bevan-Brown, Bicknell, Carroll-Lind and Kearney, 2004) found that only 10-15 per cent of New Zealand schools used a curricular model to guide their practice. Tracy Riley is currently analysing results from a replication of this study which shows similar results. "New Zealand schools still need more solid plans around what they are doing for their gifted and talented students," Tracy concludes.

Many schools in New Zealand are putting people and resources into catering for their gifted learners. The concern is: What is guiding their practices? What frameworks are being used and where do these come from? How is effectiveness being measured?

Overview of *Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent*

The curriculum developed by *Gifted Kids*, provides an example of a planned, differentiated and effective learning framework, just what Tracy is calling for, for New Zealand schools.

Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent supports the development of students' gifts through enriched and accelerated learning. Bringing like-minds together is fundamental to the *Gifted Kids* curriculum and enables the delivery of the programme goals – for students to:

- Develop an understanding of themselves as gifted individuals;
- Explore and develop gifts, talents and passions;
- Engage in abstract and complex learning;
- Experience and embrace new challenges; and
- Create and innovate.

Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent has three content domains.

Personal Development: students learn about giftedness, grow in their understanding of themselves as gifted individuals, and learn to self-advocate and problem-solve for personal and social change.



Gifted Kids teacher Nomi Wald conferences with Zulkifli about his talent development project

AND: A ROAD LESS



Talent Development: students receive enriched and accelerated learning in their areas of talent and pursue their learning passions.

Conceptual Development: students learn about universal and macro concepts, such as Discovery, Change and Systems, and their associated big ideas, including generalisations, principles and theories, which facilitates abstract, complex and integrated content learning.

Each of the curriculum domains is included as a separate component, however, they are integrally connected and much of the students' learning draws from more than one content domain.

The content domains are accessed and developed through differentiated learning processes related to thinking and research. These learning processes facilitate greater depth, complexity, personalisation and self-directedness in learning.



The *Gifted Kids* Curriculum capitalises on opportunities for like-minded children, like Trace and Rody, to work together.

(Gifted Children's Advancement Charitable Trust, known as *Gifted Kids*, 2013)

A key component of the 2013 edition of the *Gifted Kids* curriculum is the inclusion of **Progressions** and **Scope and Sequence** frameworks to guide planning and assessment. "Students can attend *Gifted Kids* from Years 2–8, so it's important for us to provide learning experiences with increasing sophistication and complexity. We also need to be able to measure growth in the depth of students' understanding and their ability to be self-directed learners, over time," says Anna Meuli, Associate Principal at *Gifted Kids*.

The Curriculum Development Process

Getting to this point has not been a quick or easy task. The curriculum has been through numerous iterations over the years and an ongoing process of literature review, practice, reflection, evaluation and internal and external review has helped to refine the document. This follows the Ministry of Education's recommendation that curriculum design should be a continuous, cyclic process (Ministry of Education, 2007). This process can be replicated by schools to develop their own curriculum frameworks, either for their gifted students or other groups of students whose learning needs require extensive differentiation.

Key Milestones

Deb Clark, CEO at *Gifted Kids*, sites a number of events as key milestones in the curriculum-development process. While these milestones are specific to *Gifted Kids*' experience, there are key messages for all those working to develop curricula for gifted.

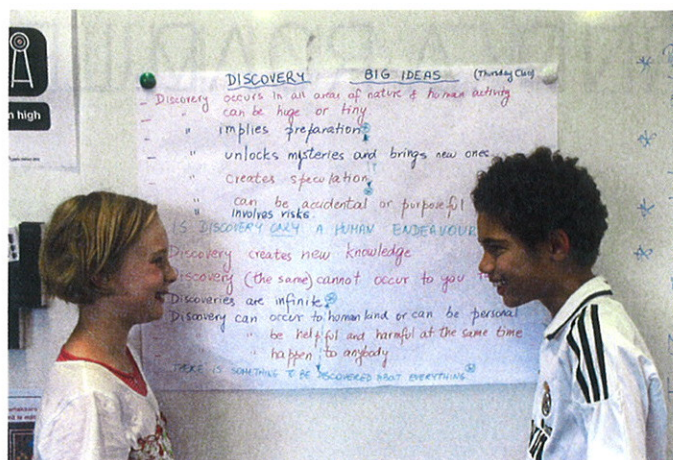
Changes in staff: In the mid-2000s, key staff members who had started the programme left. They had a huge wealth of knowledge about the gifted curriculum but this was not well documented. This prompted the *Gifted Kids* team to better record their practices and the theory and research that underpinned it. The curriculum has also been challenged and further developed by new staff members joining the team, bringing new ideas and practices to the organisation. With gifted education often being the responsibility of a single staff member in a school, it's important that they are supported by a committee and the process is well documented. New staff should be invited to contribute to curriculum development and should be familiarized with the curriculum as part of their orientation.

International conferences: When *Gifted Kids* began in the early 2000s, very little was happening in Gifted Education in New Zealand, so they went off-shore for inspiration. Staff members have attended conferences in Australia, Canada, the United States and Asia. "Each time staff went to an international conference, there was a shift in our curriculum," says Deb. Attending international conferences, subscribing to journals (like APEX: The NZ Journal for Gifted Education), joining professional associations (like giftedNZ: The Professional Association for Gifted Education) or joining a listserv (like the TKI Gifted and Talented Community) also provide schools with opportunities for engaging nationally and internationally with other research, theory and practice.





Epeli and Daniel tackle advanced algebra problems together, as part of the talent development programme



Mia and Epeli with some of the Big Ideas about Discovery that they developed with their classmates

The establishment of a Focus Group: In 2006, *Gifted Kids* formed a Focus Group, made up of their own specialist education staff. This team was given responsibility for curriculum review and development. This was an important milestone," says Deb, "because it allowed for a valued and targeted focus on curriculum development." A school's gifted and talented committee may engage in similar reviews, or a review panel can be established for the purpose of evaluating a school's curriculum for gifted.

Keys to Success

Not all curriculum development is good and not all curriculum development results in quality provisions for learners. There are a number of keys to ensuring the process is successful.

Allow time: "If you really want the quality, it takes time," says Deb. Time needs to be allocated to staff to do the work required. The formation of a Focus Group with regular day-long meetings is an example of how this can be successfully done. It also takes time to put recommendations into practice and to review and refine a curriculum. Curriculum development is an evolutionary process that takes years, with no specified end point.

Connect with experts: Ongoing review of current literature and an awareness of relevant research is very important for effective curriculum development. It's also important to involve others outside of your school or organisation in your journey. For example, in 2009 *Gifted Kids* sent their curriculum to four gifted education "experts" for review, which provided excellent recommendations for further development. In 2013, they brought Kim Tredick, Lead PLD Facilitator on the use of the Depth and Complexity Framework from J Taylor Education in the US, out to New Zealand to work with the Focus Group on the Conceptual Domain of the curriculum. The group also worked with Tracy Riley on the Scope and Sequence component.

Work collaboratively: It's important to take a collaborative approach to curriculum development. This means involving all of your staff at some level so that they have ownership of the curriculum. Different staff members will all be involved at different levels – some are curriculum developers and writers, others put the curriculum into practice and provide feedback. "Not everybody has to be involved in the initial creation to own it," says Deb.

Stay focused: Effective curriculum development requires an unwavering focus on the needs of your learners and your programme goals, especially when development occurs over many years. There can be a temptation to latch onto one idea and be blinkered to alternatives or to follow the latest trend. Looking at what others are doing is one component of curriculum development, but it should not dominate the process or be seen as a "quick fix".

Deb Clark concludes, "*Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent* provides a model that schools can draw upon of what *gifted kids* need to support and advance their learning. It's a New Zealand model and is about what New Zealand educators and kids need." There is clearly a need for further curriculum development for gifted and talented learners in New Zealand schools. Thankfully, principals and teachers can draw on the experience and expertise of the team at *Gifted Kids*.

NOTE:

Gifted Kids Consultancy provides tailored professional development services for educators, curriculum delivery and parent support workshops. If you are interested in speaking to *Gifted Kids* about curriculum development, professional development or the delivery of *Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent* in your community, please contact admin@giftedkids.co.nz.

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