

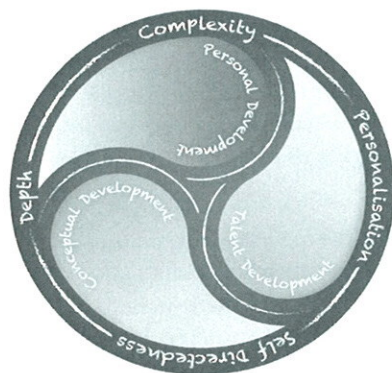
Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing talent

by Joanne Bate

Gifted Kids began to formally record their curriculum for New Zealand gifted learners in the early 2000s. It has been through many reviews and iterations since then. Eleven years later, after a major revision in 2013, the curriculum is barely recognisable as the same document. 'I'm extremely proud of my staff and the work that they have done on our curriculum over the years. It's comprehensive, effective and aligns with recommended practice in gifted education,' says Gifted Kids CEO, Deb Clark.

Curriculum Framework

The new curriculum, entitled *Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent* supports the development of students' gifts through enriched and accelerated learning. The curriculum has three content domains: personal development, talent development and conceptual development. These content domains are accessed and developed through learning processes related to thinking and research, which are characterised by depth, complexity, personalisation and self-directedness.



Content Domains are:

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.

Talent Development: students receive enriched and accelerated learning in 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.

Learning Processes

Learning processes are the vehicles that enable students to access and work with sophisticated content. Research and Thinking Processes are essential components of the new Gifted Kids' Curriculum. These are taught and used in the context of learning in the three content domains. These learning processes facilitate greater depth, complexity, personalisation and self-directedness in learning.

Major Changes

In 2013, the Gifted Kids Focus Group, made up of four specialist teaching staff, conducted a major review of the curriculum. 'We were pretty happy with what we already had in terms of curriculum components and content,' says Anna Meuli, Gifted Kids Associate Principal, 'but really wanted to consolidate and update some parts of the document.' This resulted in keeping the core existing curriculum but regrouping some components, shifting some emphasis and updating literature references. The review resulted in major changes.

Stronger Emphasis on Kaplan's Depth and Complexity Framework
Gifted Kids first began to use elements of Kaplan's Depth and Complexity Framework in 2010, however it was not completely embedded as an integral component of the curriculum until more recently. In the past, the Framework had mostly been used to support Conceptual Development. It is now used to support learning in all three content domains. 'The inclusion of Kaplan's Framework in the learning processes of the curriculum now pushes all staff to use it across the content areas and provides a common learning language for the staff and students,' comments Sue Barriball, teacher and Associate Principal at Gifted Kids.

Part of Kaplan's Framework is the exploration of universal concepts, a part of Gifted Kids' practice for many years. In 2013, Gifted Kids invited Kim Tredick, Lead PLD Facilitator on the use of the Depth and Complexity Framework from J Taylor Education, to work with their staff. A key point from the two days with Kim was the different approaches that could be taken to learning about universal concepts. Staff had been using a deductive approach, providing the students with a concept and breaking it down. The new curriculum supports three approaches to exploring universal concepts:

- Deductive: giving students the concept and the big ideas, unpacking them and finding supporting examples;
- Inductive: helping students identify concepts and generate big ideas in different areas of their learning; and
- Interconnected: aiding students to find connections between concepts.

Introduction of a Scope and Sequence

In 2009, the Gifted Kids Curriculum was reviewed by a number of New Zealand Gifted Education experts including Dr Tracy Riley from Massey University and Professor Roger Moltzen from Waikato University. Tracy's review suggested further development of a Scope and Sequence in the curriculum to guide planning, assessment and reporting. In 2013, the Focus Group invited Tracy to work with them for a day to pull this component together. This resulted in the development and recording of two tools for Gifted Kids' teachers:



- Progressions, which show shifts towards in-depth understanding and increasing self-directedness; and
- Scope and Sequence charts for the three content domains, which help plan for increasing sophistication and complexity of understanding in these content areas.

The Progressions and Scope and Sequence aid teacher planning, enabling teachers to deliver and track differentiated learning over several years of a students' attendance at Gifted Kids. They also provide a framework for assessment and written reporting to parents and schools, which is done twice a year. Sue says that this has given staff clarity around why and what they're teaching, and where to go next. 'It has made differentiating for readiness so much easier.'

Repositioning of the Teaching of Thinking

Teaching thinking has always been a strong component in the Gifted Kids Curriculum. It was the first documented component of the curriculum back in the early 2000s, referred to as Mental Edge. Until recently, Mental Edge has been treated as a content domain, alongside Talent Development, Conceptual Development and Personal Development. The recent review has resulted in a different treatment of Mental Edge.

This change was strongly influenced by Robert Seney's recommendations in *Process Skills and the Gifted Learner*. Seney states that 'teaching process skills in isolation, instead of in the context of high-level or abstract content is inappropriate for gifted learners'. The Focus Group recognised a need to shift Mental Edge from a content domain to a learning process which weaves through the content domains. This has changed teacher's practice around teaching thinking. Now, thinking skills are taught as-and-when needed in relation to learning new and advanced content, rather than in isolation.

Stronger Emphasis on Cultural Inclusiveness

Cultural inclusiveness has long been a component of the Gifted Kids curriculum. However it didn't have a clear place in past editions. Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent now positions Cultural Inclusiveness within the section on Learning Processes. This ensures personalisation of learning and clearly defines what cultural inclusiveness means at Gifted Kids. The new curriculum has learner outcomes associated with cultural inclusiveness such as identifying their cultural values and determining the cultural significance, application and direction of their learning. This curriculum recognises culture as an important aspect of a learner's profile and facilitates differentiation in response to this. A research base has been recorded to underpin Gifted Kids' practice in this area.

Where to Next

The Focus Group is interested in making clearer links between Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent and education policies and documents such as the NZ Curriculum and Ka Hikitia. At first, the Gifted Kids' curriculum aligned very closely with the NZ Curriculum. The current curriculum has moved away from this; it is more focused on the specific needs of gifted and talented learners and more reflective of recommended practice in gifted, rather than general education. Such a shift was essential for Gifted Kids as specialist education providers, but the organisation also recognises that they work in partnership with mainstream schools and therefore demonstrating the links is essential for clear and transparent communication with schools, parents and other interested parties.

The Focus Group believes that the curriculum is now ready for international review. Tracy Riley has recommended that it be submitted to the National Association for Gifted Children's Curriculum Studies Network Award. This would see Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent benchmarked against externally developed criteria. Aspects of the curriculum that would be judged include clarity of objectives, instructional strategies, nature of differentiation and opportunities for Talent Development. 'It's ready to put out there for others to judge,' says Tracy.

Making a Difference

Having only been fully implemented in 2014, it's too early to know the full impact that this revised curriculum might have on teachers and students. It was received with enthusiasm by the teaching staff who commented on having a much clearer idea of the big picture and a greater sense of where, why and next steps. 'These Progressions and Scope and Sequence are gold!' enthused Gifted Kids Lead Teacher Sue Bufton. After just seven weeks of using Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent, Sue Barriball commented 'I can see an even higher level of engagement, particularly from my returning kids. They are thinking at a more sophisticated level.'

Te Whakawhanake Pūmanawa: Developing Talent is unique. It's a curriculum developed in New Zealand by our teachers specifically for our gifted children. No doubt this will not be the last iteration of the Gifted Kids curriculum, but this version looks to provide a framework for exciting, engaging and quality learning for the current generation of students who attend Gifted Kids. Whāngai ka tupu ka puawai. That which is nurtured blossoms then grows.

Joanne Bane was Associate Principal at Gifted Kids until December 2011. She has a Masters Degree in Education with a focus on gifted, through Massey University.