

Giftedness for Our Time and Place

Rosemary Cathcart
REACH Education

Abstract

In the absence of any one single internationally accepted definition of giftedness, New Zealand has officially opted to advise schools to develop their own definitions. How wise is this for a policy? Can we come closer to a definition that is sound in terms of research and that also reflects what is uniquely and essentially New Zealand? This paper looks at the two main approaches to defining giftedness and then seeks to consider them within the New Zealand context, taking into account our culturally embedded values and our commitment to equity of provision.

Definitions: Our Current Approach

All over the world, wherever people are concerned with identifying and providing for gifted children, the first question is how to define giftedness. Different countries have different answers to this question, answers shaped by tradition, culture, ethical concerns, religious or spiritual beliefs, even politics; they may be influenced over time by emerging research, demographic changes, or economic developments.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, our official answer has been that schools should reach their own definition, reflecting the needs of their particular community (Ministry of Education, 2012). The reasoning behind this approach would seem to be a concern to acknowledge the differing natures of local communities - rural versus city, affluent versus low income, and Pakeha versus a higher proportion of Māori. The apparent intention to avoid imposing restrictive or inappropriate definitions is well meant - but it takes no account of the fact that most teachers in most New Zealand schools (and in early childhood) appear to have little or no training in gifted education and little or no knowledge of the research in the field. On the contrary, a perception of gifted children as automatically successful and in no need of extra support remains widespread. Parents and teachers who do want to support these children continually find themselves up against these negative stereotypes.

In other words, without intending to do so, we have essentially avoided the issue. How can we formulate a definition that draws on the research, reflects our bi- and multi-cultural values, and provides realistic and constructive guidance for our teachers? In reaching for answers to these questions, educators are confronted by a division of opinions amongst the experts, with two very different approaches currently dominating international discourse around this topic, each differently framing the choices educators must make. Yet neither approach fully resolves all the issues inherent in developing a gifted programme.

The First Approach: Gagné's Talent Development Model

The most widely used definition of giftedness at the current time is almost certainly that which has its roots in Gagné's (1985) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent. Refined and further developed over the intervening years (Gagné, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2015), the defining element of his model is the sharp distinction Gagné has drawn between giftedness as high potential or aptitudes on the one hand, and talent as high achievement or excellence on the other.

This was a fresh insight in the 1980s, when the prevailing model was Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring definition. It was common then to hear giftedness and talent referred to either as indicating different *degrees* of ability, with talent being on the lower rank, or as referring to ability in different *fields*, with giftedness being applied to intellectual traits and talent being used for more physical manifestations, as in sport, music, or dance. But Gagné had observed that there were numbers of individuals who were undoubtedly gifted, with assessed high IQs or other indicators of exceptional ability, but who never actually reached a high level of performance in any field. Gagné was the first to use the terms "gifted" and "talented" to make an important distinction between those gifted individuals who were able to manifest their ability in outstanding performance while others with the same level of ability failed to do so.

Defining a Significant Role for Teachers. Gagné recognised the crucial role of various catalysts in bringing potential to performance. He has refined this concept (see Gagné, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2015), developing more fully the relationship of catalysts to talent emergence and development. The catalysts include environmental and intrapersonal influences, physical/cultural/social milieu, teachers, parents, family, peers, and resources, the opportunities offered for enrichment, the curriculum, and the prevailing pedagogy; the access to and the content and format of the activities the individual is exposed to; the investment of time, energy, and money, and progress, involving differing stages, pace, and important turning points. The role that chance can play is also acknowledged. He has also changed the name of his model from “Differentiated Model” to the more proactive “Differentiating Model” (Gagné, 2015).

Acknowledgement of the role of catalysts is of huge significance for educators and policy-makers. It highlights the crucial role teachers have to play if the gifted individual is to bring his or her inherent exceptionality to full maturity. It is our obligation to ensure our teachers have the professional understanding, knowledge, and skills needed to identify and cater for the gifted child, from early childhood through to leaving school.

Gagné (2015) has specific steps necessary for teachers to implement his model: highly selective access, early intervention, full-time ability grouping, systematic enrichment to ensure students are faced daily with appropriate challenges, customized accelerated pacing, and the setting of “personal excellence goals” (pp. 287-291). Thus, teachers have a clear structure within which to work.

Problems with This Approach. But Gagné’s (1985, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2015) model may not provide an adequate response to our search for a definition. On the contrary, both his own and others’ interpretation of his model have arguably led to a narrowing of provision for gifted students. Few would disagree with his advocacy of early intervention, or with the need for a systematically developed programme, or with the use of both accelerated pacing and enrichment, though his definition of both these terms is open to more than one point of view. And while the full-time ability grouping he urges is simply not achievable in many school situations, especially at the primary school level, some access to grouping has to be an important and necessary goal. The research very clearly shows us this, most recently in a comprehensive survey of a century of research on this topic

(Steenbergen-Hu, Makel, & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016).

However, Gagné’s whole philosophy is skewed towards the achievement of excellence in performance: no other goal exists for him. Individual students are to set personal excellence goals; the gifted programme itself is successful only insofar as it results in tangible performance outcomes. In his 2015 paper, he rejects the word “gifted” altogether, and argues that “talented” should replace it as the most appropriate term, and that we should be concerned specifically with academic talent development (Gagné, 2015). Apparently, all the other areas of human ability and achievement are no longer important, at least not for educators of the gifted. It is not clear what happens to the role of the catalysts in this new interpretation. Are they no longer relevant? Is it no longer necessary to nurture unrealised potential? If you reject giftedness as a reality prior to actual achievement, how do you ensure that achievement may eventuate? Gagné (2015) speaks of “highly selective access” (p. 290) to programming: evidently we are back to recognising those who are already achieving, with, it seems, no provision for the many Gagné himself observed as not doing so.

In short, Gagné’s decision to reject the word “gifted” is a denial of his own most basic premise - that giftedness and talent are two different but interrelated dimensions and must be distinguished from each other in order for their relationship to be understood. Contemplating this, one reaches the extraordinary realisation that, right from the very first DMGT (Gagné, 1985), the missing element in Gagné’s definition of giftedness is - giftedness. He refers to natural or inherent abilities and he lists the domains in which such abilities may occur, but nowhere does he explore or illuminate for us the nature of giftedness and what it represents for the individual child or young person in terms of living his or her daily life. Can a child possess true exceptionality without there being implications for his or her perceptions of and response to the surrounding world, for his or her self-concept and self-belief, for his or her interactions with family, with peers, with teachers, with other adults, with the expectations of school and society - not just the influence these things have on him or her, but the impact he or she may have on others? We must look elsewhere for an answer to this question. Gagné simply does not address it.

Nevertheless, the talent development approach appears to have been welcomed by many policy-makers and administrators, and by many teachers. Undeniably it is an approach which

makes life more manageable: assessment based on measurable performance is easier, quicker, and cheaper than assessment using a qualitative approach, results in fewer students being identified and needing provision, and means that provision is more straightforward, and outcomes are more readily evaluated. These are relevant and practical considerations for administrators trying to cope with limited funding and resources and for busy, overworked teachers dealing with youngsters with a wide range of differing learning needs, including behavioural issues. For many, it is also more readily comprehensible than a more complex qualitative approach to identifying and providing for the gifted. But is it truly adequate?

We may well ask this question when we ponder the recent emergence in many places internationally of a focus on “STEM” subjects - Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics - as the basis for a gifted programme. Nowhere more than in Egypt is it more apparent that it is a concern for economic national benefit rather than for the child’s own development. In that country, according to Hussein’s (2017) annual report to the World Council for Gifted Children, in 2012 the Ministry of Education issued a decree to establish STEM schools, and has given this high priority, aiming to provide STEM students with an education that will “reinforce their potential skills and equip them with the tools required to lead the ship” (p. 7), a move the report describes as “a turning point” (p. 7) in Egyptian education. The report concludes with a strong statement about the potential economic contribution gifted students can make to their country’s future, and this, rather than the needs of the students themselves, may be the primary aim.

Egypt is one example of a country giving greater priority to its economy than to its children’s individual needs, but it is not alone, and there are other potential impacts of such an approach. The arts and humanities appear to have little place in the STEM approach. A tentative attempt in some countries to expand STEM to STEAM to recognise the arts seems to have made little headway - hardly surprising if your concern is with economic outcomes. It is a situation which appears to be reflected in reported declines in the arts and humanities in our universities. For example, a report released by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2017), noted a 20% drop in degrees awarded in these fields over the past decade (cited S. Jaschik, 2017). In the UK, a noted former professor of literature, film and theatre studies, Dame Marina Warner, in an interview with the *Guardian* (Preston, 2015), about a similar drop in that country, spoke of a

sense that “the future is being robbed”. While not in any way denying the value of STEM subjects or dismissing the need to nurture specific talents, we must surely pause and consider whether the balance is right here. If we share Warner’s concerns, then we may need to look for a definition less narrowly orientated.

The Second Approach: The Asynchronous Definition - A Child-Centred Model

The alternative key definition offers us this explanation of the phenomenon of giftedness:

Giftedness is Asynchronous Development, in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counselling in order for them to develop optimally. (Columbus Group, cited in Morelock, 1992)

This definition was developed by a small group of people - Neville, Silverman, Kearney, Morelock and Tolan (Neville, Piechowski, & Tolan, 2013). They had all been either parenting or working for years with highly and exceptionally gifted children: Neville, for example, as director of an early entrance college programme for exceptionally gifted girls, Silverman as director of the Gifted Development Center, and Kearney as founder of the Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children. They were all concerned with what they strongly believed to be the failure of the talent development approach to recognise, let alone understand, the real developmental needs of such a child. They knew from their extensive experience that such advanced giftedness showed itself in very early childhood, long before measures of academic achievement became relevant or even feasible, and they had seen that it involved many unusual traits not necessarily connected with academic performance. Tolan (1994) summed this up: such children have “a quality of mind that creates a genuinely unusual developmental trajectory The reality of giftedness remains a different experience of life”.

This “different experience of life” was reflected in a disparity between different aspects of the child’s development. All of us have some asynchrony but for the gifted individual, these differences can be extreme. For example, a child may be highly gifted in maths and science,

capable at ten of working at senior high school level, yet have very average literacy skills, and distinctly poor social skills, reverting sometimes to almost three or four-year-old behaviour. Such a situation creates huge stresses for the child, and indeed for teachers, parents, and peers.

The Columbus Group had seen that the failure to understand and provide for this different experience could have deeply disturbing consequences, including loss of self-belief, depression, frustration and despair, performance well below potential, dropping out of school, or developing an anger against society; hence their reference to the vulnerability of the gifted (Morelock, 1992). Thus, their definition has a very different focus: it is *child-centred* rather than *product- or performance-centred*.

Later, the group was joined by others with similar extensive backgrounds in the field, including Piechowski, Meckstroth, Fiedler, Mitchell Hutton, Kane, Beneventi, Gatto-Walden, and Gallagher. Both collectively and individually, they have gone on to further research and to publish a great deal of material exploring aspects of this approach (for an extensive bibliography on asynchronous development, see Neville, Piechowski, & Tolan, 2013).

The Columbus Group were not, however, the first people to advocate a child-centred approach to giftedness. Hollingworth began studying profoundly gifted children in 1916. Silverman (2014), calling her “the foremother of gifted education”, lists a number of concepts and practices which Hollingworth was the first to develop and use in gifted education, including recognition of asynchrony, emotional education, multi-cultural perspectives, educating for creativity, compacting the curriculum, the use of technology, together with coping strategies such as instruction in argumentation and the intriguingly-named “benign chicanery”.

Hollingworth’s work was followed by that of Roeper (1990) who summarised the whole intent of the asynchronous definition when she wrote: “How can we educate without knowing who the person is?” (p.10). Roeper had co-founded the Roeper School with her husband in 1946. Their philosophy, emerging from the crucible of their experiences in Nazi Germany, was to foster compassion and a sense of social justice, whilst nurturing both intellect and emotional sensitivity. As Roeper wrote: “The only agenda is the soul of the child” (cited in Navan, 2012). Thus the asynchronous definition had its roots in years of direct and sustained interaction with gifted children, and evolved naturally into a child-centred approach.

A Research Basis for This Approach. But the issue here is *why* gifted children develop such a different developmental trajectory. The primary concern of the Polish psychologist Dabrowski was with the nature and process of moral development; in particular, the process by which some relatively rare individuals progress through to a very advanced level of moral understanding and behaviour (Dabrowski, 1975; Piechowski, 1975, 2014; Silverman 2008, 2016; Tillier, 2008). In common with other researchers in this field (Kohlberg, 1971; Silverman, 1994; Parkyn, 1995; Renzulli, 2002), Dabrowski was aware that those who do reach this advanced level are also normally possessed of advanced intellectual understanding. He discovered that what differentiated these young people most distinctively from their age peers was the *intensity* with which they experienced many aspects of life. He found five key areas in which a gifted person could display such intensity: intellectual, imaginal, emotional, sensual, and psychomotor; the individual could have just one or several of these areas. Possessing such an inborn heightened awareness and response has profound implications for the individual from early childhood and throughout life. Where one person feels happy, the gifted individual may be in transports of delight; where one person is saddened or upset, the gifted individual may experience almost unendurable pain or distress. Dabrowski (1972) wrote that such a person “sees reality in a different, stronger, and more multisided manner” (p. 7, cited in Lind, nd), but perhaps Piechowski (2006) has put it most lucidly: “Giftedness is not a matter of degree but of a different *quality* of experiencing: vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, commanding - a way of being quiveringly alive” (p.2; italics not in original).

The concept of intensities, or overexcitabilities, has provided us with an *explanation* of giftedness, something which is essentially missing from the talent development model, and one which is comprehensible even to those who do not themselves experience such intensities. As Silverman (2008) has pointed out, the concept of overexcitabilities was significant because it provided giftedness with a strong theoretical foundation, offering a comprehensible explanation of the observed behaviours of gifted individuals. Thus Battaglia, Mendaglio, and Piechowski (2014) justifiably described the overexcitabilities as providing a ‘unique lens’ on giftedness, one through which we could gain a much richer and clearer picture of the inner world of the gifted individual.

It is an explanation which helps us to understand why gifted individuals are capable of those unique insights which lead to advances in

science, to fresh creativity in the arts, to acts of great compassion and humanity which model for us all the real possibility of a more caring and peaceful world. It is also an explanation which compellingly re-frames the question of how we as educators should provide for our gifted young.

Problems with this Approach. Like Gagné's (1985, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2015) talent development model, the asynchronous definition does not by itself fully resolve all the questions inherent in developing a gifted programme. However, the issues are very different. Gagné's model lacked any explanation of the phenomenon it sought to develop and had a very narrow focus, but in his most recent paper, Gagné (2015) provided two things which were crucial in helping educators translate the model into administrative and classroom practice.

Firstly, he set out a comprehensive series of practical steps for the implementation of his model. Secondly, he had a very clear goal, which was definitive and measurable. In contrast, the asynchronous model is firstly not generally seen as attached to any one specific set of practical steps, although the work of Mitchell Hutton and Kearney (Mitchell Hutton, 2013) on "developmental differentiation" does offer this. Secondly, the asynchronous definition does not have a clearly articulated and readily evaluated goal or outcome, although in the writings of those supporting this definition, there is extensive and thought-provoking discussion around the nature of the gifted individual and the implications for his or her development as a person, for example, in the collected essays in both Daniels and Piechowski, (2009) and Neville, Piechowski and Tolan (2013). But how many classroom teachers will find and read such material?

The task is to find a way to link the asynchronous definition to achievable strategies and comprehensible outcomes for both administrators and educators.

Considering Strategies for Implementation

Gagné (2015) advocated the following strategies, which he described as "essential constitutive elements of exemplary Advanced Talent Development programs" (p. 284):

- highly selective access
- early intervention
- full-time ability grouping
- systematic enrichment
- customised accelerated pacing
- personal excellence goals

Let us briefly review these in the light of the asynchronous definition, beginning with how students are to be identified and ending with more detailed discussion of that most fundamental question: What is the outcome we hope to achieve?

Selection for the Gifted Programme. Gagné (2015) requires schools to use highly selective access. This is inherently a restrictive process: the alternative is to use *qualitative assessment*. This is a concept originally developed by Roeper (1992, cited in Wasserman, 2013), which seeks to identify giftedness, not just through test scores, but through assessing the child's possession of qualities known to correlate with advanced ability but not measurable by quantitative methods. The process is described by Mitchell Hutton (2013) as an assessment also of "the child's essence - values, ethics, morals, and spirit" (p. 406), and can constructively be used alone or in combination with the more traditional tools. This approach makes possible the recognition of those gifted children, amongst them some of the most highly gifted, who, for any of a whole range of reasons, do not perform at the top of the range on the usual tests. As a footnote to this, in New Zealand, although the term was not familiar here at that time, the writer would suggest that the identification process used in the One Day School programme was essentially qualitative in type, involving a wide-ranging one-to-one interview with the child, evaluation of original creative work by the child, and a parent questionnaire and interview covering many aspects of the child's personal development and life story. School test results were certainly looked at, but initially the programme's funds did not permit the use of tests of cognitive ability. When eventually funds did become available, the programme's associated psychologist administered the Woodcock Johnson III (Grenwedge, 2009) to a number of children who had gone through the qualitative assessment process. In every case, the test scores were fully consistent with the outcome of the qualitative process (Cathcart, 2014). Thus, such a process is effective and uses steps which are achievable within a school setting, given an appropriately knowledgeable teacher as the evaluator.

Early Intervention. This is a measure strongly supported by researchers working from both philosophical standpoints. What needs to be clarified is exactly what is meant by "early". Whitmore (1986), Porter (2005), Margrain (2006), and Biddick (2009) tell us that the traits characterising giftedness are present from birth and can begin to manifest themselves even in the first year of life. Harrison (2003) weaves dozens of instances of preschool gifted children

displaying unquestionably gifted behaviour into her book for teachers and parents. Thus “early” needs to be interpreted as beginning long before formal school. A good example of this is a one-year-old child, crying on a winter’s day, and able to explain to his parents that it was because of his sadness at seeing the leaves falling from the trees (personal communication, Asif, 2016). Early childhood educators certainly should have this area included in their training, while parents need appropriate information and access to understanding and support as they realise the different issues involved in parenting such a child.

Ability Grouping. Full-time grouping, as noted earlier, is often physically impossible to achieve. Many schools, especially at primary level, simply do not have the numbers to establish specialist classes. Neither, generally, do early childhood centres. Even where schools are established solely for gifted children, the costs of attendance are likely to be beyond the means of most parents and unlikely to be subsidised to any great extent from official or business sources.

The meta-analyses by Kulik and Kulik (1992) and Rogers (2010) demonstrate that the research is extremely clear on the value of providing gifted children and young people with at least some regular and consistent opportunity to work and learn alongside those who share their very different perceptions and responses. A more recent study by Steenbergen-Hu, Makel, and Olszewski-Kubilius (2016) concluded that “After looking carefully at 100 years of research, it became clear that ... most forms of ability grouping can be powerfully effective interventions” (p. 3).

There are various ways in which such grouping can be achieved, including interschool groupings and online programmes, as well as the more widely known options. While there is not space to discuss this here, some youngsters will fit better into some grouping arrangements than into others, and some grouping options seem to have better outcomes than others. It is clear that research supports the use of grouping.

Enrichment. Enrichment is a term which appears to have been much maligned over the years, scornfully dismissed as merely ‘time filling’ or ‘activities for after school’ or as ‘just more of the same’. If teachers do not understand the true nature of enrichment, that can be exactly what happens. “Enrichment” refers to those necessary strategies which add depth and intellectual rigour to the work provided for our gifted students. Enrichment, understood in this way, is an *essential* component of gifted provision (Cathcart, 2018). Grouping will not

work without it. Acceleration will not work without it. Even individual tutoring will not work without it. True enrichment is purposeful, challenging, and carefully built. For instance, a lesson on trigonometry prepared by maths and science teacher Stephanie Chambers (Cathcart, 2010) included several tasks which went beyond simply grasping the mathematical concept, beyond even thinking about applications in practice, to challenging students to perceive and reflect on normally unconsidered connections or to consider potential ethical issues. Three of these were:

- How does symmetry in living organisms link to our perception of perfection and beauty? Can we see beauty in organisms that lack symmetry?
- Modern Paralympians have prosthetics designed with angulation that maximises performance. This is to such an extent that some Paralympians may surpass ‘able-bodied’ athletes in the field. Does this mean we are improving on the human form, and where may it lead?
- How is our individual privacy affected when triangulation of signals from cell phones can determine our location without our permission or knowledge? Should this be permissible?

How would you evaluate a student’s response to any of these tasks if your criterion was ‘excellence’? Surely the more relevant criterion here is depth of thought and understanding. And that is what enrichment really means. An important correlated outcome of this approach, as we can see in the examples above, is that it allows for and supports the student’s exploration of those values which will become central to his or her approach to life.

Differentiation. The term “differentiation” is also used without universal agreement on its meaning. Sometimes it seems to be a synonym for enrichment, to avoid the negative connotations that term has mistakenly attracted. It can also be used to signal the need to ensure lesson material for gifted students is significantly different in content, pace, process, or product expectation from that prepared for the majority. Mitchell Hutton (2013), however, speaking of her work with Kearney, uses the term *developmental differentiation* for their whole-child approach to working with gifted children. Referring to it as “differentiation for a moving target” (p.405), Mitchell Hutton explains that this embraces every aspect of the child’s ongoing development and recognises the tensions inherent in uneven or asynchronous development. Elsewhere, Mitchell Hutton (2015) lists several key principles of developmental differentiation:

- It is learner-centred

- It is not solely about school
- It is not just about curriculum or instruction
- It is simultaneous, not sequential
- It reflects both qualitative and quantitative assessment.

These principles deserve our thoughtful consideration as we seek to shape our provision for gifted learners. If we accept this approach, then it precedes and provides the philosophical base for enrichment. It is relevant to mention here that the REACH model, developed in New Zealand, is a child-centred, needs-based model which teaches specific practical strategies aligned with exactly these concepts (Cathcart, nd).

Acceleration. Acceleration is a strategy, amply proven by research, to be a very necessary component of gifted provision (Bailey et al., nd; Kulik and Kulik, 1984; Rogers, 2010; Wardman, 2015). The child who successfully learns new material faster than other children is going to be ready for the next stage in that material before other children. Enforced waiting for other children to catch up can significantly undermine the gifted child's interest and willingness to learn. There are various ways in which it can be implemented; some curriculum areas are more appropriate for acceleration than others; and there are factors of asynchronous development which need to be taken into account. Thus, Gagné's (2015) "customized accelerated pacing" is a sound principle to incorporate.

Setting the goal: Defining the outcome we seek. This brings us to the last item in Gagné's (2015) list of strategies, "personal excellence goals". In many ways, the search to do one's very best is often an inherent characteristic in gifted individuals - the positive face of perfectionism. Able to visualise a solution or a creation beyond the perception of others, the gifted individual is driven to reach for that solution or creation. Ultimately it is a deeply personal impulse, one which is at the root of all great achievement. We cannot embed that drive from without: we must and should foster but cannot impose it where it does not already abide in the individual. Our role may be simply to provide the space or the tools to allow that impulse to emerge and develop. But Gagné's (2015) talent development model seems to see "personal excellence goals" as something that can be mandated, an external requirement which students should learn to articulate, measured it seems against the standards of a system designed essentially for the non-gifted.

Let us be clear. It is absolutely *not* wrong to encourage gifted students to see themselves as capable of great achievement, to support and encourage them in developing their areas of exceptional ability, and to help them develop the commitment, self-discipline, and ability to self-critique so necessary to allow original thought and creation. But in so doing, we are looking beyond the standards of excellence we have conceived for our school system - in our most gifted individuals, we are looking to the invention of new ideas and the creation of new concepts for which, by definition, there are not yet, and cannot yet be, any measurable standards.

Certainly, there are practical considerations here. Certainly, gifted students need many aspects of what school can offer them; the qualifications to get into university, art school, journalism school, or specialised courses. Opportunities to develop leadership skills, to do voluntary work in the community, and to see lives lived differently from their own. Opportunities to challenge themselves in high-level competition against other exceptionally able students. And, from the very first day of pre-school, the experience of being accepted and valued for themselves and of being supported in exploring their unique individuality.

But as the *only* goal we set for these students, measurable excellence is, at best, an anaemic concept, a two-dimensional description of what exceptional ability means in relation to the actual life experience and life purpose of that individual. If we look at gifted adults, we cannot separate great achievements from the passion that drove them, the irresistible desire to know, the inborn adamant refusal to accept a less than elegant solution, the endless striving to capture not just beauty, but the experience of beauty in words, music, or art, or the rage at injustice that fires the charismatic social reformer. Each of these people demonstrate the intensities that Dabrowski (1967, cited in Piechowski, 1999) identified for us - it is not possible to divorce those intensities from their outcome. As educators, we need to ground our provision for our gifted children and young people in the realisation that those intensities are part of the fabric of their lives. The tiny child crying over falling leaves, described earlier, is such an instance.

Beginning to Shape a Goal: The Real Basis

Thus, setting goals for gifted students is not just about what is tangible and measurable. It is also about understanding *what matters to them*. For example, we might easily recognise one child's

exceptional ability in maths. But we need also to understand how profoundly intrigued she is with mathematical concepts, how very *necessary* it is to her to know she has grasped a new mathematical concept, how genuinely unimportant many regular school tasks may seem to her, or how impossible she finds it to understand those who think maths is boring or dumb. We see in these things the beginning emergence of the same intensities that drive the gifted adult - deep absorption in her topic, persistence in seeking understanding, readiness to explore new avenues, concern with the integrity of her thinking, and immense satisfaction in finding solutions.

For the gifted child, such intellectual intensity and emotional sensitivity intimately shape her or his values, not the unquestioning acceptance of what others say is right or true. For this child, what he or she does or is asked to do needs to be clearly justifiable and purposeful. At the most basic level, why be told to do another 20 maths examples when you have just got a perfect score on the first 20? At another level, why should you not, as a child, dream of one day becoming a professor of mathematics? Why should you keep quiet when someone, even an adult, says something you know is incorrect or does something you believe is unfair? How does being a child stop you from caring intensely about a cat being tormented, another child being bullied, or other children elsewhere having their bodies shredded with flying shrapnel or dying slowly of starvation in yet another famine? How does one reconcile the asynchronous divide between your childish status and your sharp perceptions and acute feelings? Ultimately, how can you translate those deep feelings into some satisfying and effective form of action?

Discovering a Truly Meaningful Goal. In this, we find the goal that has been implicit all along in a child-centred approach to supporting our gifted children and young people: the building of a *life vision*. Such a vision surrounds and enhances specific abilities with the addition of human values, giving a larger purpose, and a deeper relevance to the achievement of excellence. It may be that a gifted young New Zealander dreams of finding a cure for the obesity epidemic that afflicts our Polynesian population, of becoming a teacher who guides every child in becoming bilingual in both English and Te Reo (Māori language), of developing building systems that make housing affordable even for those on low incomes, of creating art that inspires a love of our country and a desire to protect its beauty, and of being a journalist whose writing on our social issues generates a move for change. In each case, the individual is going beyond concern for excellence as a measure reflecting one's own

worth to a larger view of worth to others, to humanity.

The concept of a life vision fits closely with what research tells us about the empathy for others frequently observed even in young gifted children. Silverman (1994), for example, quotes a long list of writers who have found gifted youngsters to display early ethical concerns, a strong sense of justice, and compassion for others, and cites numerous instances from the casebook at the Gifted Development Center in Denver, United States where she carries out her assessments: "We have dozens of cases on record of gifted children fighting injustice, befriending and protecting handicapped children, conserving resources, responding to others' emotional needs, becoming terribly upset if a classmate is humiliated, becoming vegetarian in meat-eating families, crying at the violence in cartoons, being perplexed at why their classmates push in line, refusing to fight back when attacked because they considered all forms of violence - including self-defense - morally wrong, writing letters to the President to try to end the Gulf War, and writing poems of anguish at the cruelty in the world." (p. 111)

Such young people can begin very early to link such emotional sensitivity to a sense of direction for their own lives. The writer recalls a highly gifted eight-year-old girl who already had thought her way through in some detail to a career which, she hoped, would culminate in her becoming the head of the United Nations, and an exceptionally gifted girl who at ten years old, attending an adult political conference, initiated political protest against child abuse, first in China and later in other countries, and who has carried that on throughout adolescence to inform the choices she is now making as she enters her university years. Certainly, such dreams can modify over time: the young political activist is now planning to enter the specialised field of ethical investment banking, thus linking in a more specific way to solutions for the issues that have concerned her. But had her apparently precocious first venture onto the political platform at an adult political conference been rebuffed, would she have had the confidence to continue to speak out so publicly? As educators, it is not only legitimate but necessary for us to support the gifted young person in developing those early dreams and hopes and concerns into a life vision.

Re-defining Success. But what then is our expected outcome? When we limit our education processes to the goal of achieving excellence, the outcome is called success and is tangible or measurable in some way. When we enlarge our education processes to include the goal of

forming a life vision, how then do we define success? We may find the answer in the lives of those who have lived their vision, for example, Mother Theresa. Can we suppose that she would look back on her life and say she succeeded because now she is elevated to the position of saint? Or did her success lie in the fact that she was able to bring comfort to dying human beings, and able to make others aware of the value of such acts? Stephen Hawking surely and quite rightly enjoyed the recognition he won, the awards, the opportunities he had and used despite his physical condition. But can we doubt that his greatest satisfaction would lie in having wrestled with a huge intellectual problem and found answers that had eluded all others? The Dalai Lama, driven out of his country, robbed of all the physical trappings of his leadership, in worldly terms a ruler without power, yet continuing to be venerated worldwide, not just by his own people. Why? Would he see himself as a failure? Or does he find meaning and effectiveness in his ability to reach out to people, to enlighten both hearts and minds?

Coming to Aotearoa New Zealand, the painter Colin McCahon - would he have said that his artistic achievement should be measured by the fact that people now pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for his paintings, or by the numbers of his paintings that hang in public and private collections? Or was his achievement the fact that he transformed how we see and experience the land that is New Zealand, both physically and spiritually? That he enabled others to see and feel what he had uniquely seen and felt? What these individuals illustrate for us is an alternative and richer definition of success. It is not the quantifiable aspects of their performance which ultimately determine their greatness, but the intrinsic nature of what they did, how it extends our understanding, enriches our knowledge, changes our vision, excites our

imagination, touches our hearts, expands our horizons. Success for them lies in the sense of realising a vision, of fulfilling one's life purpose.

Of course, not every gifted child will rise to such rare heights, but every gifted child has the capacity and, indeed, the need to develop a life vision, and for that child, success will ultimately lie in the fulfilment of that vision. And that is how we can now more satisfyingly define success: as fulfilment. We see that this involves a process which begins with the inherent inner differences of the gifted psyche, producing personal qualities, advanced abilities and distinctive traits, which in turn lead to the characteristic asynchronous development of the gifted child. Collectively, these factors combine to produce behaviours and needs which in many ways separate the gifted child from age peers. His or her resulting experiences in interacting with others, positive and negative, eventually shape that child's sense of identity, coalescing to form the philosophy and values which will drive his or her mature life and actions and lead to his or her life vision, and eventually to the possibility of fulfilment. If we were to express this in diagrammatic form, it may look like Figure 1.

There are two further points worth considering. Firstly, the process of interaction is analogous to Gagné's catalysts, but different in that it acknowledges that such interaction can be two-way: the people with whom the individual interacts are not unaffected by that encounter; they too may have their perceptions, their responses and their behaviour changed in consequence. Secondly, a very significant point about this definition is that is essentially *holistic and child-centred*. That indeed may be its most appropriate name - the holistic definition of giftedness.

Figure 1 A gifted pathway



Bringing the Vision Home. What we are considering here is a distinction between *abilities* and *qualities*. Our traditional notion of success is built around abilities measured through performance. However, building and seeking to fulfil a life vision is intimately dependent on the qualities one possesses and brings to the task. Even more importantly, those qualities will shape the deployment of those abilities. Hitler, for example, undoubtedly had great ability as a leader, but his personal qualities led to the use of those abilities in deeply evil ways.

Thus, we see the wisdom of the New Zealand Māori concept of giftedness which rates qualities as of first importance and abilities as second in order (Macfarlane, 2004, Bevan-Brown, 2009, Webber 2012). Furthermore, this set of priorities is grounded in an ethic of caring, linked to an expectation that abilities will be used in the service of the community, and infused with a spiritual awareness. In these things we find a powerful connection to the work of people like Silverman (1994), Lovecky (1997), Tolan (2000), Piechowski (2003), Parkyn (1995), and Fraser (2004), and others who have explored this larger understanding of giftedness. But for most teachers in New Zealand, we can say with some certainty that there is a lack of awareness of the Māori perception of giftedness. Māori are recognised as gifted generally only when they

perform in Pakeha terms.

And yet the Māori perception of giftedness is a point of huge significance for gifted education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our traditional interpretation of giftedness has lived a largely separate life from our equally traditional belief in child-centred learning and, as far as many are concerned, is comprehended only through a narrow focus on scores, rankings, and other performance-related targets. It is a very Western concept. We have almost completely overlooked the enormous potential value of bringing our dual cultural heritage together into a concept of giftedness of unique richness and meaning. Any definition which is going to be appropriate for our country should surely reflect this dual heritage.

So this brings us back to Gagné’s (2015) list and to a suggested revised version, based on the asynchronous definition, implemented through a child-centred approach, and recognising our unique heritage (see Figure 2).

This “Kiwi approach” aligns both with the principles of developmental differentiation and with the specific practical strategies of the REACH teaching model (Cathcart, nd). Together with the concept of a ‘gifted pathway’, it is suggested as a possible basis for New Zealand’s definition of giftedness.

Figure 2: Gagné vs a Kiwi Approach

Gagné:	A Kiwi approach:
• highly selective access	* qualitative assessment including bi-cultural indicators
• early intervention	* early intervention, beginning in pre-school
• full-time ability grouping	* flexible but regular ability grouping
---	* developmental differentiation
• customized accelerated pacing	* customized accelerated pacing
• systematic enrichment	* comprehensive in-depth enrichment incorporating intercultural concepts and understandings
---	>> values development

• setting personal excellence goals	* forming a life vision
• success	* fulfilment
Gagné (2015)	Cathcart (2018)

Summary and Conclusion

A major issue for New Zealand, as it is for any country, lies in trying to decide that most basic of questions - how exactly to define giftedness. Clearly, we need to reach some decision about this before we can decide how to identify such children or plan provision for them. Yet to date we have largely avoided facing this question, leaving schools to decide for themselves, whilst simultaneously omitting it from most of our teacher education. Reviewing the two key international approaches led to the conclusion that the talent development model as advocated by Gagné (1985, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2015) usefully clarified the significant role of the teacher and was popular because it was easy to understand and implement, but nonetheless essentially failed to define giftedness itself and led to a comparatively superficial approach. The asynchronous definition, grounded in Dabrowski's research (Piechowski, 1999) and in its advocates' extensive work with gifted children, offered a child-centred approach much more closely aligned with New Zealand's traditional views about education and schooling, but was more complex to understand for teachers without training in the field and was not linked, as Gagné's model was, to specific teaching strategies. Developmental differentiation, which could provide at least the foundation for building such strategies, was not widely known.

The intention of this paper was to seek a sound and workable solution to this problem. It is suggested that the concept of a gifted pathway, coupled with the "Kiwi approach", does finally provide the asynchronous definition with the practical, comprehensible context which will make it accessible for teachers who seek to understand and support their gifted learners, possibly not just for this country but for those elsewhere wanting to work with this definition.

But specifically for New Zealanders, this approach enables us to recognise the diversity of our community, not by leaving teachers to make up something they think suits, regardless of the research, but by returning to the roots of our education system, the child-centred approach, so that we can recognise, respect, and respond to individual difference. We weave into this first the rich bicultural concepts and values that are our joint heritage; as this becomes embedded in our understanding, we shall find room to embrace the other cultures who have come to share our country. In supporting the concept of a life vision, we acknowledge also the independence and innovative spirit which has so often seen New Zealanders create change, from Kate Sheppard, leading the fight for women's suffrage, through to Sam Johnson, leading his

fellow students in creating the Student Volunteer Army after the Christchurch earthquakes, and in so many ways by so many other Kiwis, both the famous and those who are known only locally but who use their initiative, empathy, and ability to make a difference for others. In short, our gifted pathway offers us a rich, diverse and fulfilling route eminently suited to the needs of Aotearoa New Zealand.

References

- Bailey, S., Chaffey, G., Gross, M., MacLeod, B., Merrick, C. & Targett, R. (nd) Types of acceleration and their effectiveness. Retrieved from <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Search-Database/entry/A10487>
- Battaglia, M.M.K., Mendaglio, S. & Piechowski, M.M. (2014). Kazimierz Dabrowski: A Life of Positive Maladjustment. *A century of contributions to gifted education: Illuminating lives*. Eds. A. Robinson & J. Jolly. (181-198). New York: Routledge.
- Bevan-Brown, J.M. (2009). Identifying and providing for gifted and talented Māori students. *APEX: The New Zealand Journal* 15(4), 6-20. Retrieved from <http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex/>
- Biddick, M. (2009). Cluster grouping for the gifted and talented: It works! *APEX: The New Zealand Journal* 15(4), 78-86. Retrieved from <http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex/>
- Cathcart, R. (2010). *Differentiation Made Practical*. Invercargill, New Zealand: Essential Resources.
- Cathcart, R. (2014). Will this history have a future? *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*, 23(2), 45-59.
- Cathcart, R. (2018). Enrichment: Hidden riches. Presentation to the NZAGC conference *Giftedness from the Inside Out*. March 2018. Auckland.
- Cathcart, R. (n.d.). What is the REACH model? Retrieved from http://www.giftedreach.org.nz/resources_reach_model.htm
- Dabrowski, K. (1975). Foreword. In M.M. Piechowski, A theoretical and empirical approach to the study of development. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 92, 231-297. Massachusetts: The Journal Press.
- Fraser, D. (2004). The giftedness that dare not speak its name ... Some educational implications for spiritual giftedness. *Gifted Education International*, 18(3), 255-265.
- Gagné, F. (1985). Giftedness and talent: Reexamining a reexamination of the definitions. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 29, 103-112.

- Gagné, F. (2004). Transforming gifts into talents: The DMGT as a developmental theory. *High Ability Studies*, 15, 119-147.
- Gagné, F. (2007). Ten commandments for academic talent development. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 51, 93-118.
- Gagné, F. (2009). Building gifts into talents: Detailed overview of the DMGT 2.0. In B. MacFarlane & T. Stambaugh (Eds.), *Leading change in gifted education: The festschrift of Dr. Joyce VanTassel-Baska* (pp. 61-80). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Gagné, F. (2015). Academic talent development programs: A best practices model. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 16, 281-295.
- Grenwelge, C.H. (2009). Test Review: Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 27(4), 345-350.
- Harrison, C. (2003). *Giftedness in Early Childhood* (3rd ed.). Sydney: GERRIC/Inscript Publishing.
- Hussein, Y. (2017): Delegate Discourse: Egypt. *World Gifted: Newsletter of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children*, 36 (1), 6-7. Retrieved from www.world-gifted.com.
- Jaschik, S. (2017). Humanities Majors Drop. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/06/05/>
- Kohlberg, L. (1971). *Stages of moral development*. Retrieved from <http://info.psu.edu.sa/psu/math/Stages%20of%20Moral%20Development%20According%20to%20Kohlberg.pdf>.
- Kulik, J. A., & Kulik, C-L. C. (1984). Effects of accelerated instruction on students. *Review of Educational Research*, 54(3), 409-425.
- Kulik, J.A. & Kulik, C-L.C. (1992). Meta-analytic findings on grouping programs. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 36(2), 73-33.
- Lind, S. (2001). Overexcitability and the gifted. *The SENG Newsletter*, 1(1) 3-6.
- Lovecky, D.V. (1997). Identity development in gifted children: Moral sensitivity. *Roeper Review*, 20(2), 90-94.
- Macfarlane, A.H. (2004). *Kia hiwa ra! Listen to culture - Māori students' plea to educators*. Wellington: NZCER.
- Margrain, V. (2006). In the eye of the beholder: Parent, teacher and researcher assessment in a study of precocious readers. *Kairaranga* 7(2), 5-10.
- Ministry of Education. (2012). *Gifted and talented students: Meeting their needs in New Zealand schools*. Wellington. Learning media.
- Mitchell Hutton, B. (2013). I bet your teacher training didn't prepare you for this: esponding to asynchrony in the classroom. In C. Neville, M. Piechowski & S. Tolan (Eds.) *Off the charts: Asynchrony and the gifted child*, (pp. 398-411). New York. Royal Fireworks Press.
- Mitchell Hutton, B. (2015). Developmental Differentiation: Doing what comes naturally. Presentation to symposium, *Off the Charts*, April 2015. Auckland.
- Morelock, M.J. (1992). Giftedness: The view from within. *Understanding our gifted*, 4(3), 1, 11-15
- Navan, J. In Tribute: Annemarie Roeper (1918-2012). Retrieved from www.sengifted.org.
- Neville, C., Piechowski, M. & Tolan, S. Eds. (2103). *Off the Charts: Asynchrony and the Gifted Child*. New York: Royal Fireworks Press.
- Parkyn, G.W. (1995). The identification and evaluation of gifted children. In R. Cathcart & P. Meikle (Eds.), *To the aesthetic road: Neglected areas of giftedness: A series of papers 1975-1984*, (pp. 5-17). Wellington: NZCER.
- Piechowski, M.M. (1975) A theoretical and empirical approach to the study of development. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 92, 231-297. Massachusetts: The Journal Press.
- Piechowski, M.M. (1999). Overexcitabilities. Paper presented to Northland College, Wisconsin. Retrieved from <https://www.positivedisintegration.com/Piechowski1999.pdf>
- Piechowski, M.M. (2003). Emotional and Spiritual Giftedness. In N. Colangelo & G.A. Davis, *Handbook of gifted education*, (3rd ed.) Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Piechowski, M.M. (2006). *'Mellow out', they say, if only I could*. Wisconsin: Yunasa Books.
- Piechowski, M.M. (2009) The inner world of the young and bright. In D. Ambrose & T. Cross (Eds.), *Morality, ethics, and gifted minds*. New York: Springer.
- Piechowski, M.M. (2014). The roots of Dabrowski's theory. *Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness*, 14, 28-41.
- Porter, L. (2005). *Gifted young children: A guide for teachers and parents*, (2nd ed.). Crow's Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Preston, A. (2015). The war against humanities at Britain's universities. *The Guardian*, 29 March 2015.
- Renzulli, J.S. (1978). What makes giftedness? Re-examining a definition. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 60(3), 180-184.
- Renzulli, J.S. (2002). Expanding the conception of giftedness to include co-cognitive traits and to promote social capital. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 84(1), 33-40.
- Roeper, A. (1990) *Educating children for life: The modern learning community*. New York. Royal Fireworks Press.

- Rogers, K.B. (2010). Grouping the gifted and talented: Questions and answers. *Roeper Review*, 24(3), 103-107.
- Steenbergen-Hu, S. & Olszewski-Kubilius, P. (2016). Summary: What One Hundred Years of Research Says about the Effects of Ability Grouping and Acceleration on K-12 Students' Academic Achievement. *Academics Research*. December 6 2016.
- Silverman, L.K. (1994). The moral sensitivity of gifted children and the evolution of society. *Roeper Review*, 17(2), 110-116.
- Silverman, L.K. (2008). The Theory of Positive Disintegration in the field of gifted education. In Mendaglio, S. (Ed.) *Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration*. Ch. 8. Scottsdale, Arizona: Great Potential Press Inc.
- Silverman, L.K. (2014). Leta Hollingworth: Birthmother of PG (Profoundly Gifted). Retrieved from www.gifteddevelopment.com.
- Silverman, L.K. (2016). Empathy: The heart of Dabrowski's theory. *Advanced development: A Journal of Adult Giftedness*, 15, 32-46.
- Tillier, W. (2008). Philosophical Aspects of Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration. In Mendaglio, S. (Ed.) *Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration*. Ch. 5. Scottsdale, Arizona: Great Potential Press Inc.
- Tolan, S.S. (1994) Discovering the Gifted Ex-Child. Retrieved from www.stephanietolan.com.
- Tolan, S.S. (2000). Spirituality and the highly gifted adolescent. Retrieved from www.stephanietolan.com.
- Wardman, J. (2015). To act or not to act? Academic acceleration worked in the past, so what's the holdup in New Zealand? *Apex, The New Zealand Journal of Gifted Education*, 19 (1). Retrieved from www.giftedchildre.org.nz/apex
- Wasserman, J.D. (2013). Identification of gifted learners: Alternative Assessment Methods. In C. Neville, M. Piechowski & S. Tolan (Eds.) *Off the Charts: Asynchrony and the Gifted Child*. (347-397). New York. Royal Fireworks Press.
- Webber, M. (2012). *Gifted Māori : Multiple identities, multiple pathways*. Presentation at giftEDnz Conference, Amora Hotel, Wellington, 31 March 2012 - 01 April 2012.
- Whitmore, J.R. 1986 (Ed.). *Intellectual Giftedness in Young Children: Recognition and Development*. New York: The Haworth Press.

Contact Details

Rosemary Cathcart
REACH Education
Email: crcathcart@xtra.co.nz

Biographical Notes

Rosemary Cathcart has been involved in gifted education since the 1980s in a variety of roles including as an advisor, college tutor, programme developer, author, conference presenter, Ministry panellist, and advocate. She founded New Zealand's first professional gifted education centre, set up its successful One Day School programme, and now heads REACH Education specialising in professional development in gifted education. In 2017, REACH won the US NAGC Professional Development Network Award and Rosemary herself became an invited member of the Columbus Group. In 2016 she completed a doctorate on ethical leadership in gifted adolescents.