

Celebrate Gifted Aotearoa NZ

Catalysts of Success

11-17 June 2018



New Zealand Centre
for Gifted Education
Empowering Extraordinary Minds

Defining Giftedness in Aotearoa New Zealand

Whāngai ka tupu ka puawai. That which is nurtured blossoms, then grows.

Giftedness exists in Aotearoa New Zealand and has been defined by educators, parents, researchers and policymakers as a construct embodying extraordinary potential and performance in all areas of human endeavour. Terms like gifted, gifted and talented, GATE, talented, special abilities, and able are all used, sometimes interchangeably, to describe learners with exceptional abilities and qualities.

The Ministry of Education's handbook for gifted and talented, first published in 2000, revised in 2012 and serving as a framework for the 2017 [refreshed tki website](#), has expressed very clearly that giftedness is socially and culturally constructed. The Ministry asks schools to work with their communities – teachers, whānau, and children – to co-create a school-based definition, which, in turn should inform identification practices and provisions across a continuum of enriched and accelerated approaches to learning.

Co-Creating Definitions of Giftedness

The criteria we need to use for defining giftedness and talent include [multicategorical concepts](#) that encompass an array of abilities, across all areas of the curriculum, as well as qualities, like leadership, creativity, caring and thinking. [Bicultural approaches](#) incorporate Māori concepts, values, beliefs, attitudes and customs – and we extend this cultural responsiveness and inclusivity to other cultures in our schools and communities, including Pāsifika. Importantly, potential and performance – that is, the raw material that can be developed, as well as demonstrable knowledge and skills exceeding that of peers of the same age, culture or circumstances – should shape our definitions. Exceptional abilities and qualities are not limited to one academic area, sport or talent; learners may have extraordinary skills and knowledge for age in one or more realms.

Contemporary views of giftedness acknowledge that students with exceptional abilities are found in every group in society, regardless of culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender and disabilities of all types. In other words, there is an expectation to identify and provide for gifted and talented students in every classroom in Aoteroa – not only because our National Administration Guidelines demand it, but because, our definitions acknowledge that giftedness is not isolated to some groups of children in some classrooms in some schools.

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Responding to Giftedness

Importantly, the whole point in defining giftedness and talent is to provide differentiated educational opportunities, including social and emotional support. A good definition of giftedness expresses the relationship between a learner's characteristics, their strengths and interests, and a [responsive educational programme](#). Embedding identification of potential and performance in responsive learning environments also recognises that students' gifts and talents emerge over time, in situational experiences and learning opportunities that may be unique to them. Identification of exceptionality is not about labelling, it is, rather, the link between a student's learning characteristics and an appropriate educational response.

Giftedness and talent in today's world seeks to identify individuals and groups of learners' strengths, interests, qualities and abilities. Teachers of gifted and talented students respond to unique learning characteristics with learning that is at the right pace, depth and breadth, often with like-minded peers, to empower gifted students with a greater understanding of themselves, how they belong in the world and what they can contribute. Through self-acceptance and acknowledgment of their abilities and qualities, gifted and talented students' well-being and sense of belonging are strengthened. Matching teaching and learning to gifted and talented students' abilities and qualities, develops their resilience, discipline, deep learning, strategic thinking, empathy and courage, alongside knowledge and skills.

Failure to identify and respond to giftedness may lead to a group of students who are marginalised and misunderstood. Underachieving gifted individuals, like any learner who experiences failure to thrive in educational settings, may struggle to contribute positively to society, may use their unique abilities in ways that are socially and culturally unacceptable, or may experience serious mental health and wellbeing [challenges](#). Thus, it is critical that educators respond to giftedness not only in terms of academic, intellectual or creative constructions, but also [social and emotional development](#).

Working Together

Our organisations exist for a singular shared purpose: to recognise and respond to gifted New Zealanders – children of all ages, and their parents, teachers, and communities who support them. We recognise the potential of gifted children to shape the future, as entrepreneurs, creators, leaders, discoverers, and change agents. We commit to working together with our constituencies, the groups of gifted children, families and professionals we represent, to help potential be realised. Like gifted people, our services are under-recognised, under-supported and under-resourced, but this lack does not drive us away from our vision: to identify and respond to giftedness. We welcome the engagement and involvement of all New Zealanders who share our vision.

A Position Statement supported by:

New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education

giftEDnz: The Professional Association for Gifted Education

New Zealand Association for Gifted Children

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