

Mythbusting

Gifted Awareness Week
17th-23rd June, 2019



A Position Statement on Specialist Teachers of the Gifted

*giftEDnz: The Professional Association for Gifted Education,
the New Zealand Association for Gifted Children, and
the New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education*

Gifted learners are taught across a continuum of services in New Zealand through differentiated, enriched and accelerated curricula. A continuum of services begins in inclusive centres and classrooms and extends to centre- or school-based and community provisions, including withdrawal programmes, competitions, mentoring, online learning, events, experiences and opportunities. Most gifted children and young people are taught in regular classroom environments; therefore, all teachers are teachers of the gifted ([Ministry of Education, 2012](#)).

Our organisations believe that the need for all teachers to understand the nature and needs of the gifted does not obviate the need for specialist teachers. We believe specialist knowledge and skills should be acquired through a professional pathway of formal pre- and in-service teacher learning alongside ongoing professional learning and development.

The Roles of Specialist Teachers of the Gifted

Specialist teachers work as part of a team of professionals who support gifted learners. Specialist teachers of the gifted work in partnership with gifted learners, parents and caregivers, whānau, and professional colleagues, including school leaders, teachers, educational psychologists, learning support specialists, health professionals and professional development providers. Across the continuum of provisions for gifted learners, the work of specialist teachers can be in many different learning environments, including early childhood centres, schools, specialist centres, tertiary facilities, museums, libraries and other community organisations..

Specialist teachers of the gifted facilitate learning by providing a range of teaching, leadership and support activities, such as:

- teaching across different services;
- assessing learning strengths, interests and needs;
- planning appropriate curricula and programmes;
- assisting learners in accessing provisions;
- monitoring learning progress and achievement;
- contributing to Individual Education Plan (IEP) planning and implementation;
- working with parents and whanau;
- leading policy, strategy and programme implementation;
- modelling effective teaching strategies and practices;
- guiding and assisting classroom teachers to differentiate curricula;
- adapting and creating learning materials and resources; and
- facilitating professional learning and development.

Developing Specialist Teachers of the Gifted

Specialist teachers of the gifted require in-depth knowledge and skills across a breadth of competencies focused on three key capabilities:

- 1) knowledge of the cognitive, social and emotional differences in learning and development between and among gifted learners;
- 2) understanding of the factors that influence developmental and learning differences in the gifted, including culture, socioeconomic background, disabilities, gender, learning environments and experiences, and ethnicity;
- 3) skill in how to identify and respond appropriately educationally, socially and emotionally to these differences in learning and development.

These capabilities are situated within the broader ethical, social, cultural and political dimensions of gifted education in New Zealand, and are developed through initial and ongoing professional learning with increasing specialisation over time.

Initial Teacher Education

The knowledge and skills of specialist teachers are typically not developed in initial teacher education in New Zealand. As part of a continuum of development of teacher capability in gifted education, all teachers should be introduced to identification of giftedness, characteristics and needs of the gifted and effective differentiation for gifted learners in regular classrooms. It would also be beneficial for all teachers to have exposure to evidence-based principles and practices in gifted education.

Our organisations call on all initial teacher education programmes in New Zealand to include coursework on the nature and needs of gifted learners, along with appropriate differentiation strategies to meet those needs. We recognise that even with improved initial teacher education, the regular early childhood or school teacher may not have the full range of skills and knowledge required to meet the needs of gifted learners across a continuum of approaches. However, we support these strategies as a necessary foundation to both enhance the general understanding of the regular teacher and build towards the development of specialist teachers.

Professional Learning and Development

Ongoing professional learning and development in gifted education enhances teacher capability and builds capacity for meeting the needs of gifted learners. Gifted education principles and practices should be integrated across all professional learning and development, but there also needs to be opportunities for depth in learning. Gifted education professional learning and development needs to be ongoing and accessible, so as to develop and support a community of practice in gifted education.

Our organisations support ongoing professional learning and development in gifted education for all teachers. We call upon the Ministry of Education to support a range of professional learning and development opportunities. We urge principals and school leaders to explicitly recognise gifted learners in their interpretation of national priorities for professional learning and development. We call upon facilitators and providers to seek to incorporate responses to giftedness as foundational to good teaching practice – across the curricula, for all diverse learners. As professional organisations and associations, we commit to providing formal and informal teaching and learning about the needs of gifted learners.

Specialisation through Advanced Coursework and Research

Specialist teachers of the gifted require in-depth, advanced knowledge and skills development to enable them to fulfil their roles in teaching, coordination, facilitation and leadership. Advanced coursework in New Zealand may be provided through professional educational consultancies or through tertiary education providers. Specialist teachers in New Zealand need access to a continuum of advanced study opportunities from certificate level through to Masters and Doctoral degrees. Non-accredited coursework can act successfully as a stepping stone into postgraduate level study.

Advanced coursework should include in-depth analysis, application and creation of evidence-based practice grounded in theory and research and in the lived experiences of gifted learners, their whānau, and the professionals supporting them. Advanced content should be embedded in teaching through practical experiences that include opportunities for critical reflection, identity development and interprofessional collaboration.

Specialisation should extend to research in gifted education, including professional inquiries into practice and philosophical investigations into the scholarship of teaching and learning through deep reflection and gathering of evidence of effectiveness. Specialist teachers should also engage with and in empirical research that may be qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods.

Our organisations believe that advanced coursework should be expected of all gifted education specialists. We seek endorsement, encouragement and opportunities for specialist teachers of the gifted to develop and apply their skills as part of the specialist teaching workforce. We call upon the Ministry of Education to provide funding support for teachers to increase their qualifications through undertaking advanced coursework, particularly where costs for teachers to specialise can be high.

Valuing Specialist Teachers of the Gifted

The Ministry of Education's endorsement of a continuum of services that extends beyond the classroom reflects New Zealand's strong commitment to gifted learners and should be personalised for individuals and groups of learners by teachers with specialist knowledge and skills. Our organisations believe that in order to uphold New Zealand's commitment to identifying and providing for gifted learners, as outlined in the [National Administration Guidelines](#), and the position of [Te Whāriki](#) as "a curriculum for all children", the roles of specialist teachers need to be defined, developed and supported. We call upon the Ministry of Education and the education sector at all levels to recognise the in-depth knowledge and skills of specialist teachers of the gifted, and to support their ongoing learning and development as valued members of the teaching profession.

Ma te mahi ka mohio, ma te mahi ka marama, ma te mahi ka matatau

Through practice comes knowledge through knowledge comes understanding,
through understanding comes expertise.

A Position Statement supported by:

New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education
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