

# Leading together...

**A short course on practical organisational strategies for Gifted Coordinators, Learning Support Coordinators, and related professionals**

## How to use this booklet

This booklet has been written for teachers who find themselves assuming a specialist role in their schools, such as becoming a Learning Support Coordinator or Gifted Coordinator. Such roles involve some significant advocacy to management and to colleagues, something that has often been outside the experience of most classroom teachers. This booklet has been written to provide a very practical guide for any teacher finding him or herself in this situation.

It is intended as a “self-review document”. It is divided into four modules covering key aspects of the Coordinator’s role. Each module is accompanied by a short “Reflection and Practical Tasks” sheet, designed to help you link what you’ve read to your own situation, evaluate what you find, and identify the most helpful steps you can take to keep growing and improving what’s happening in your school.



**Acknowledgement:** This material was originally developed in 2019 on behalf of Gifted Aotearoa, a Ministry-funded project involving three key gifted agencies in New Zealand, REACH Education, the NZ Centre for Gifted Education and the NZ Association for Gifted Children. With the project drawing to a close, it was decided with the agreement of all parties to ensure continued access by putting it into booklet form. Original title: “Waka Kopapa: Leading together”. Script: Dr Rosemary Cathcart. Editor: Sue Barriball. Graphics: Zeus Te Ahuru

## Module 1: Defining a starting point

Welcome to our short course on this important role for your school!

You may have come to this course through one of several pathways. You may be working as a gifted education teacher or Coordinator or as a Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO) or as an RTLB. You may have an existing management role, perhaps as the DP or the PLD Coordinator, and now your school has decided to include this dimension in your job description. Or perhaps you are a classroom teacher sympathetic towards children with additional learning needs and interested in an opportunity to work in more depth with them. The practical strategies this course describes are relevant to all these roles. Thus, whatever your role now, we'll refer simply to "Coordinators".

In the past these have usually all been separate roles. But in 2018 the Ministry developed the Disability and Learning Support Action Plan. One intended outcome of this plan is to ensure that eventually every school has a Coordinator responsible for all students with additional learning needs<sup>1</sup>. Because this covers a wide diversity of needs, the Coordinator is likely to have increased opportunities to provide guidance and leadership for colleagues. Thus one aim of this course is to support you in preparing for this expanded role.

One area which has previously been treated separately from other learning support needs but which will now be included is provision for the gifted learner. Many of the issues facing teachers working with these students are the same as or similar to those faced by teachers working with students with other additional learning needs. For those of you for whom gifted education is a new area, we will include some material specific to understanding the support role, overcoming difficulties and achieving positive outcomes for gifted learners and their teachers.

### Where do we start?

#### Responsibilities

Let's begin with a job description. The following tasks are those which can fall within the responsibility of the Coordinator:

- Guiding the development of a sound research-based school policy for students with additional learning needs.
- Making sure the school has in place an appropriate research-based system for recognising learners with additional learning needs, taking into account the nature of your particular community. (For example, taking into consideration steps that might be needed for different cultural groups in your community).
- Maintaining a "register" or database which keeps track of what happens for individual students – what provision is made for them from year to year, how they respond to this, any additional special needs they may have, and so on.
- Ensuring parents/whanau are kept informed and are consulted about what is happening for their children.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Additional learning needs" – current terminology for "special" or "diverse" learning needs.

- Making recommendations for specific students about class placement or any other needed specialised action, and, when appropriate, setting up and overseeing IEPs (Individual Education Plans) for individual children.
- Working with individual teachers to support their provision for learners with additional learning needs in the regular classroom situation – this could be helping with planning, doing a classroom observation, working with the child in the classroom, etc.
- Where appropriate, organising and teaching withdrawal groups (eg for gifted learners).
- Managing the learning support budget and where necessary presenting the case for funding increases or adjustments; acquiring resources and managing their use and storage.
- Liaising with the school's professional development committee to ensure PLD relating to learners with additional learning needs forms part of the school's ongoing PLD cycle and ensuring teachers are kept informed about one-off events of special interest such as conferences in this field.
- Undertaking a regular review of learning support provision throughout the school.
- Keeping management and the school board well informed about the status of the school's provision for learners with additional learning needs, any achievements, and any emerging needs or other factors to be taken into account.
- Maintaining your own ongoing professional development in this field through courses, networking, reading and conference attendance.



Now obviously this is a fairly formidable list! No-one could expect you to accomplish all this in your first few months.

But, firstly, it provides a guideline for assessing what is currently happening in your school and for identifying both strengths and gaps.

Secondly, it gives you a framework for developing a strategic plan over one, two and then three years and then for your ongoing review process.

Thirdly, it sets out a clear and firm basis for your approach to management for adequate time and resourcing for the school's learning support provision. It makes it obvious that the role of the Coordinator is major and must have management support.

Fourthly, it supports you in seeking to continue your own professional development. Most who take up this expanded role will need to add to their existing knowledge and skills. If, for example, your work has previously been with students struggling with basic literacy, you might at present have little knowledge of the very different needs of gifted learners, and vice versa. It recognises too the ongoing need to keep yourself up to date with developments in research and best practice.

### **Your position in the school – how does it relate to your work with colleagues?**

When we look at the way in which various additional learning needs have been provided for in our schools, we see that to some extent they tend to fall into a “fringe” area. Not every teacher feels competent to help students in this category; not every teacher wants the extra workload they feel is involved in providing for such needs.

Those kinds of hesitations are understandable, given the pressures teachers work under today and given also that specific training in recognising and meeting such needs has not necessarily been part of every teacher's professional education. Consequently, classroom teachers may see this as outside their remit, and Boards of Trustees and school managements also may have given this area comparatively little consideration.

This "fringe" perception has certainly been true for many of those involved with gifted provision. Where Coordinators have been appointed to such a role, they may find they have as little as two hours a week – sometimes no time at all – to implement any provision, no budget, no link to management and sometimes only reluctant cooperation from colleagues who don't see this as relevant for them. Of course there are schools which make this integral to their planning and do so very successfully – but there are more who do nothing or only very little.

If you are involved with another aspect of additional learning needs, you'll know how far this is true for you too. You may have hit some of the same barriers. Alternatively, your situation may be positive. But the new plan is going to make extra demands on all of us, whatever our present circumstances.

So how *should* the role of Coordinator be perceived? Here's how we envisage it:



As Coordinator, you're the leader! You're the knowledgeable and skilled guide, setting the pace and supporting others in reaching the goal of adequate provision for all learning needs. That's going to be your role!

### **ERO agrees.....**

Back in 2008, ERO undertook a major survey of schools' provision for gifted and talented students. It identified "commitment and leadership" as critical factors. It found that where provision was effective, it was because leadership was strong and collaborative and provision was integrated into schoolwide practice. Although these comments referred to gifted students, it seems clear that ERO would see leadership as the key to managing provision for all additional learning needs. (*Schools' Provision for Gifted and Talented Students June 2008*: Wellington: Education Review Office)

### **What does this mean in practice?**

Essentially the purpose of providing support for students with additional learning needs is grounded in that most fundamental statement of principle for New Zealand educators, dating from the 1930s but still profoundly relevant today:

The Government's objective, broadly expressed, is that all persons, whatever their ability, rich or poor, whether they live in town or country, have a right as citizens to a free education of the kind for which they are best fitted and to the fullest extent of their powers. So far is this from being a mere pious platitude that the full acceptance of the principle will involve the reorientation of the education system.

– Peter Fraser, Prime Minister, & Clarence Beeby, Director-General of Education. (Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives: (AJHR). (1939). E. 1. p, 3).

The central phrase here is the commitment to education *of the kind for which they are best fitted*. This is about equity, and equity does not and never has meant “the same for all”. It is about providing fairly and with respect for and understanding of difference.

Nevertheless, in practice we have an education system in which teachers at all levels are well trained in teaching to the middle but less well prepared to cope with those outside that middle ground – those who are “different”. In recent years we have seen worries over whether or not to mainstream students with disabilities. We have seen increasing concern about teachers having to cope with behavioural issues of various kinds, including such sad cases as children with fetal alcohol syndrome and “P-babies”. We still find teachers who are unaware of conditions such as dyslexia, and it is very common still to find teachers who sincerely believe gifted students all automatically succeed and need no extra support or understanding or, conversely, deny the very existence of gifted learners by claiming that all children are gifted, and who therefore are reluctant to give precious time to these students. These are all causes of stress and pressure on teachers who are already in a very demanding job.

Thus the task of providing for students with additional learning needs tends to be seen as one demand too far for the classroom teacher. Yet these students are in our classrooms and they are in our schools, and as such they are, or should be, an integral part of the school community.

If we are to achieve this, then the role of Coordinator has to be one with some authority, a voice which can be heard at management level as well as being a wise guide at classroom level, not just as someone who takes students away to work with them elsewhere, even though that may be part of the role too. In short, it is a leadership role.

Consequently this expanded role in learning support means taking on a new level of responsibility and building a different kind of relationship with one's colleagues. It may also need a different kind of leadership from more traditional management roles.

### **What does “leadership” mean to you?**

What does the concept of leadership imply? Roland Barth, founder of Harvard Principals' Centre and an inspirational writer on school leadership, described a very relevant purpose for school leaders:

Schools are full of good players. Collegiality is about getting them to play together, about growing a professional learning community.

Linda Lambert, Professor Emeritus, California State University, in an article on creating a leadership framework within a school, wrote very directly:

The days of the principal as the lone instructional leader are over. We no longer believe that one administrator can serve as the instructional leader for an entire school without the substantial participation of other educators.

These comments surely fit well with what we might hope to achieve. Simon Sinek, businessman, academic, charitable trust supporter and leadership expert, summed up the *process* of leadership like this:

Leadership is a way of thinking, a way of acting, and, most importantly, a way of communicating.

These writers summarise a more inclusive view of leadership, one that is increasingly common, grounded in our vision and our deep understanding, and realised through the focus we put on communicating that vision and that level of understanding.

NB: You can read more from these people at:

- Roland Barth: <https://www.smore.com/33n5-roland-barth>
- Linda Lambert: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may02/vol59/num08/A-Framework-for-Shared-Leadership.aspx>
- Simon Sinek [https://www.ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action](https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action)

## Building that communication framework

So our goal is to raise the status of additional learning needs from being a fringe concern to being a valued and integral part of a school's function. It is therefore also about raising the status of the Coordinator – someone who is listened to and who has input into school policy and decision-making. We can only achieve this through building strong and effective communication networks with the key people in our school community.

Let's begin by thinking about the people we need to communicate with.

They include:

- the Board of Trustees
- the school management team
- parents/whanau
- classroom teachers.



Each of these groups has a different role to play, and the Coordinator needs to communicate with each of them.

## The Board of Trustees

The BOT should:

- understand that the school's vision and policy should accommodate students with additional learning needs, including the gifted
- proactively seek to keep informed about the school's provision for students with such needs
- ensure a report from the Coordinator features at least once a term on the Board's agenda
  - acknowledge the inclusion of Student Voice in such reports
- ensure a budget for the Coordinator's work is included in the annual budget plan
- support the Coordinator in undertaking in-depth PLD and/or other PLD activities and events

- receive submissions from parents, whanau, teachers and/or students relating to unresolved issues or suggestions for improvement which might require Board approval or additional funding.

### *How can you communicate with your BOT?*

First of all, there's that regular report. Be brave! You may have to initiate this practice if no-one thinks to ask for it. But there's nothing like the dripping tap. Quiet persistence can be quite surprisingly effective.

Keep putting your report in front of the Board, and sooner or later they will start to look for it.

- Keep it short and succinct.
- Highlight successes.
- Highlight needs and opportunities.
- Include each time a brief report about different aspects of your work with different groups of students, so that gradually they build up an overall picture.



Remember that you are *entitled* to ask to appear before the Board if you have a special matter you want to raise – it's surprising how many individual teachers and how many parents do not realise they have this right and therefore don't exercise it.

Get to know your Board members. Is someone on the Board the parent of a gifted student or of a student with some other special need? That person can become a powerful advocate for you on the Board.

BOT elections coming up? Who among your parents might be persuaded to stand and become that advocate?

These and some of the following may seem like very simple strategies. They are. But they are strategies used by effective changemakers – and they are strategies which are surprisingly often overlooked.

## **The School Management Team**

The school management team should:

- ensure it has a clear understanding of the range of additional learning needs the school has to cater for
- ensure the school vision statement accommodates and acknowledges students with additional learning needs, including the gifted
- carefully develop a job description and appoint an appropriately qualified Coordinator
- require the Coordinator to assess and report on the current state of provision for these students and to make any necessary recommendations for change or improvement
- work with the Coordinator to develop a sound and comprehensive policy for meeting the needs of these students
- ensure staff are clear about what help or guidance they can expect from the Coordinator and what management expectations are for their own planning
- encourage and support the Coordinator in undertaking further study, attending relevant conferences and other events and linking with regional or national networks
- ensure this area is included in the annual budget

- build in a commitment to regular annual review of learning support provision and procedures.

*How can you communicate with the management team?*

Again ensure you report regularly to the management team, highlighting successes, needs and opportunities, but do so even more frequently than to the your BOT – usually monthly.

Encourage the team to move towards including you in their regular meetings.

Proactively seek to be included in developing or reviewing vision and policy statements.

Remember that members of the management team, despite their seniority, have come through a teacher education system which generally did not provide teachers with adequate information about additional learning needs. Encourage your management team to send one of them with you to major events such as conferences and to participate fully in any school PLD related to this area. Offer to do a PLD session just for the management team.



## Parents and whanau

An interesting finding by a leading researcher on gifted children, Dr Linda Silverman, was that around 80% of the parents who brought their children for assessment as possibly gifted were entirely correct, and that for about another 14%, those children were on the borderline of giftedness – an astonishing total of 94% of parents getting it right or very close. This contradicts general teacher legend – that parents are likely to be wrong when they say a child is gifted, especially when the teacher doesn't see it themselves. One reason for this, Dr Silverman believes, is that gifted children generally learn very early that they don't altogether "fit in" with other children at school and often adopt ways of behaving aimed at being accepted by others. But their parents see their more natural or instinctive behaviour at home, and then face the difficult task of convincing teachers that it actually happens. (Silverman, L. K. (2013). *Giftedness 101*. Appendix: What We Have Learned About Gifted Children. (pp. 235-242). New York: Springer).



How much of this could apply to students with other additional learning needs? How often, in fact, do parents and whanau have a better or even just a different knowledge of their children? How often do they lack the skills or the confidence to explain these things to teachers? How good are we at inviting such information?

In a nutshell, parents and whanau are the experts on their children and should be respected as such.

- They are the advocates for their children and need to have clear, well-advertised channels to communicate with the school.
- They are entitled to participate in decisions which affect their child's placement, programming and other activities.
- They should be kept informed through regular reports about the child's performance and progress in any learning support programme or activity, including gifted programmes.

- They should have access to advice about sources of information and support relevant to their child's needs.

#### *How can you communicate with parents and whanau?*

Ensure there is a statement in the school prospectus outlining the support that is available for students with additional learning needs and for their parents. Include details on how parents or whanau can contact you.

Check that there is a space on the school enrolment form for parents or whanau to signal any additional learning issues or needs, including unusual or exceptional interests or abilities.

Take particular care to ensure there is a liaison with a spokesperson for the Māori, Pasifika or any other cultural community. Ensure you are yourself aware of cultural responses to additional learning needs.

Work towards ensuring staff have positive and informed concepts regarding the additional needs they might be coping with in the classroom so that their discussions with parents or whanau are appropriate and constructive.

Ask to have reports on progress in any special programme or initiative included in school reports.

Arrange parent/whanau group meetings to share information, discuss issues, etc. Such groups can themselves become powerful lobby groups supporting you in seeking BOT or management provision for students with additional learning needs.

### **Classroom teachers**

Classroom teachers should be able to show that they:

- are aware of students in their classrooms who have additional learning needs including gifted needs
- understand the implications of these needs for learning and behaviour
- are open to parents or whanau offering information they believe indicates a need for different or additional provision
- are able to recognise students who could potentially need extra support and should be referred to the Coordinator for assessment
- are prepared to liaise with the Coordinator on providing for these students, including where appropriate involvement in out-of-class and even out-of-school provision
- understand and use strategies for differentiating lesson material
- ensure their lesson planning is consistently inclusive of such material.



#### *How can you communicate with classroom teachers?*

Ask for occasional opportunities to attend syndicate or department meetings to check on issues of general interest or concern relating to classroom management of students with additional learning needs.

Share with the classroom teacher work students have done in any special programme which demonstrates successful learning and discuss the teaching strategies used.

Take a few minutes to demonstrate new or under-used resources which help students with special or different needs at staff meetings and encourage staff to try this material.

Encourage teachers to come with you to attend conferences or other events – set the principle of “not just one but at least two” for such events.

Try to develop a team approach to building school-wide provision for additional learning needs. Where staffing permits, look for one person in each syndicate or department to be your link person. Meet with these people at least once a term to review activities and plan ahead.

Check that every teacher knows about your school database or register of students with additional learning needs, especially whenever students change teachers, and is aware of their own students who are on the register.

### ***In summary so far....***

A key part of your role lies in building these important communication links with each of these groups.

It's worth repeating the fact that though many of the ideas suggested for building such links may appear very simple, they are nonetheless the kinds of strategies practice has shown to be effective over time.

You may have some of these strategies in place already, or they may be new to you. No-one would expect you to introduce them all at one time, but when you've assessed the current situation in your school, these various steps could act as a checklist linked to your strategic plan for development.



*Here's your first Reflection and Practical Tasks (R&P) page.....*

### ***Reflection...***

*We suggest that as you complete reading each module, you take a few minutes to think about the key issues that have emerged for you from your reading. What seemed to you to be the most important points in relation to your own situation? Was there anything which surprised you that you might need to explore further? For example:*

1. What do you see as the positives of your role, and what issues do you think there might be?
2. What's your response to seeing this as a leadership role? How useful is this?

### ***Practical tasks***

*In each module we will suggest some practical tasks for you. These are the essential steps towards building your eventual strategic plan. In this module:*

In the module we made reference to several matters which are relevant to providing for students with additional or different learning needs:

- Vision
- Policy
- Budget
- Enrolment forms and prospectus
- Database or register

Your task is to locate these items at your school and then to find out whether any of these items make specific reference to additional or different learning needs.

Keep a note of what you've found. In the next module we'll be looking at matters like these and discussing what *should* be included, as a step towards creating your strategic plan. In Module Four, we'll bring all this together.

### ***Something to***

#### ***Some material for further reading or watching***

*Improving Schools from Within* and *Run School Run*, both by Roland Barth, a former school principal and founder of the Harvard Principals' Center.

Linda Lambert: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may02/vol59/num08/A-Framework-for-Shared-Leadership.aspx> A discussion round developing leadership capacity among all members of the school community.

<https://sites.google.com/site/domainsofgiftedness/home> : A useful diagram showing the range of giftedness and reminding us of the many domains in which giftedness can emerge.

Simon Sinek [https://www.ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action](https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action)  
Thought-provoking thoughts about leadership.

Welby Ings <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aumxbgOdkRU> about disobedient thinking but also about his ideas on feedback, marking and constructive criticism.

*Scroll on down for Module Two.....*

## Module 2: Policies, systems, procedures

### The vision statement

Even before we look at policies, let's consider the school's vision statement. Essentially this is a statement which sums up what the school and its community see as its ultimate purpose – its philosophy, its whole approach to caring for its students, its hoped-for outcomes for each child. It should shape the policies we develop. It should be relevant and meaningful for every student attending the school.

What does this mean for students with additional learning needs, including those who are gifted learners? Fraser and Beeby spoke of an education “fitted to their needs”. We can take that as a founding principle – but what does it mean in more specific terms? Many schools speak of helping all students to “fulfil their potential”. What exactly do we mean by “potential”? And does it imply that growth and development have an end point? New Zealand researcher Louise Tapper called potential an “enigma” – something that in real terms can never be fully measured or known. Given the diversity we find even in the general student population, let alone the range of differences amongst the gifted as well as amongst those with other additional learning needs, *can* we, in fact, form for ourselves a vision statement that will embrace all those we provide for?

REACH Education has a vision statement for its work with gifted learners:

- That every gifted child is met with recognition and caring understanding of his or her different learning and developmental needs, and supported in developing his or her qualities and abilities to the full.
- That each gifted child will be so nurtured that he or she will grow in wisdom, insight and compassion in the use of his or her talents in the wider world.
- That each gifted child will be empowered with the belief that every individual can make a difference in creating a better world.
- That every gifted child will retain a sense of fun and delight in the process of living and being.
- That every teacher will have the support and guidance needed to achieve this vision.

The Ministry of Education puts it a little differently:

Gifted and talented learners are recognised, valued, and empowered to develop their exceptional abilities and qualities through equitable access to differentiated and culturally responsive provisions. (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 12).

How do either of these statements relate to your school's vision statement? Are there elements in these statements which could usefully apply to students with other additional needs? What could you add that would give these statements wider relevance? What might you change, or leave out?

You have had a chance now to look at your school's vision statement. Does it make any specific reference to gifted students or to students with additional learning needs? Should it do so? If it is a more general statement, does it adequately provide for these students?

We'll come back to this issue in your R&P sheet. Meanwhile, we turn to a related issue...

## Developing policy

Your school will undoubtedly already have a general policy statement and may well have developed some policies for more specific aspects of its operation. Does it have a policy on meeting additional learning needs? Does it have a policy or procedure which specifically mentions gifted learners?

Before we think about the contents of such a policy, it's also useful to think about how a policy can help you in your communication with your BOT, school management and colleagues, especially if people raise questions about the need for any particular action. Here's how a policy can provide some useful questions to prompt action:

- A policy represents a *commitment* by the school management to the issue concerned - "It's in our policy - we have to do something about it."
- A policy helps to ensure that *resources* are made available - "It's in our policy - we'll need to provide for it."
- A policy provides a *framework for planning and action* - "What do we have to do?" "Well, what does the policy say?"
- A policy provides a *basis for evaluation* - "Have we done everything we're supposed to? Have we met our goals? Let's check the policy!"
- A policy makes it harder for people to *avoid the issue* - "It's in our policy - why aren't we doing something about it?"

Furthermore, the *process* involved in writing a policy helps people to confront the issues and to clarify their thinking. It may make them ask questions they've never asked before:

"What are the important things we've got to take into account here? How can we find out? Who can guide us about this?"

A first step is to ensure that your school's general policy does at least have a statement which commits to meeting the needs of students with additional learning needs. But beyond that, much more specific statements are needed if the school is to have a clear and well-thought-through guideline for this aspect of its functioning. Some critical points for inclusion:

### *A Policy....*

- has a definition of students with additional learning needs; this should now include recognising gifted learners
- states its aims in making provision for such students
- allocates responsibility
- is school wide in approach
- commits to the development of:

- a sound identification process
  - appropriate programming
  - appropriate resources
  - effective record-keeping
  - relevant evaluation
  - efficient management systems
- pledges to maintain continuity of provision
  - recognises special issues such as gender, culture, etc
  - provides for
    - funding
    - ongoing professional development for staff, both specialist staff and classroom teachers
  - provides for regular monitoring and review
  - is supported by a strategic action plan.



Achieving such a comprehensive policy, if it does not already exist, can itself become part of your strategic plan, developed in stages as you generate more awareness and understanding amongst your colleagues.

### The budget



Always a key item! What should it include?

The first essential item is **time**. We all know and accept that teachers already work under pressure and that there is limited flexibility in the hours management can allot to work away from the chalk-face.

But for too long this has been given as a reason for expecting teachers with responsibility for additional learning needs to somehow achieve their task within an impossibly meagre time span. It's not unknown for teachers to be asked to do this job totally as an extra, over and above their normal teaching load. It's certainly not unusual to find teachers trying to cover this area with just a couple of hours or a half day per week. Even specialist learning needs teachers can find themselves with basically a fulltime job but only a half time allocation of hours.

Accepting all the arguments about scarcity of resources, these limited hours nevertheless reflect limited awareness of the needs of this group of learners, and consequently limited valuing of the real extent of what's required to meet those needs.

In your discussions with your BOT and management, you can point out that time is needed for:

- assessment tasks
- arranging appropriate placement for each student
- programme planning
- organising (and possibly teaching) withdrawal groups where appropriate
- maintaining a database and other records
- in-class teacher support
- individual parent support
- IEP development and IEP meetings
- storing and maintaining resources
- staff PLD
- maintaining your own knowledge – your personal PLD relevant to the position.

In addition, the budget should cover:

- the purchase of resources

- subscriptions to relevant professional associations and journals
- costs associated with staff PLD
- costs associated with your personal PLD
- an annual review of provisions for students with different and additional learning needs.

Such a very specific list is absolutely necessary when you are seeking to convince BOT and management of the need for improved funding for this area. It helps you to identify the gaps in funding, and it provides a framework for building a more adequate budget, over time if it cannot all be done immediately. Then you have a basis to return to in your annual review.

- This is exactly the sort of thing where networking with Coordinators in other schools can be helpful. Being able to point out that other schools in your district have much more generous budgets or cover a wider range of items can be a powerful persuader!

### Creating and maintaining your database or register



Generally known as a “register”, a good database is really essential to efficient organisation. It’s certainly very necessary when you’re dealing with the diverse and often extremely complex issues faced by students with additional learning needs and by their families and teachers.

A register helps in many ways. It helps you to:

- keep a record of who has been identified as having additional learning needs
- keep a record of the specific needs of each identified individual
- readily locate students with specific needs who may be grouped together or targeted for a specific relevant activity
- keep a record of the provisions actually made for

each such student so that you can check that each individual’s needs are being adequately met

- check who is currently participating in what form of provision
- monitor the individual student’s response to provisions made
- keep a record of any special achievements by the student.
- see how a student was identified so that you have a source of reference if you need further information about that student.
- write reports and providing other documentation
- locate basic data to assist in evaluating the school’s provision for its students with additional needs, support requests for resources, etc.

Some practical points to consider:

- Who can access the register?
  - Most information should be able to be accessed by all teachers, but sometimes there will be matters a family does not want generally shared. How will this information be stored?
- Who can input information?
  - Again all teachers should be able to add information if they are working with

any students with additional learning needs.

- How will teachers know how to use the register?
  - Develop a short set of guidelines to explain what information is held in the register, who can access it and how to do so, and who can input information, and how to do so.
  - It's wise to ensure you monitor what other teachers have added. There may be information you need to follow up. Occasionally you may be alerted to a teacher's need for guidance or clarification of a particular issue.

A school can also use its register as a tool for evaluating its overall provision and for planning how to overcome any identified gaps. For example, here's a list of issues generated by a review specifically of gifted provision in a high school:

- We're identifying twice as many boys as we are girls. We need to check our teachers understand what to look for with gifted girls.
- The students we're identifying as gifted mathematically are opting out of the maths enrichment programme after a semester. A couple of those who've opted out have actually done better in the external exams than those who've stayed in. We need to review the programme.
- Next term we're doing an intensive on maps and mapping using computer technology. Which students are most likely to benefit from that?
- Since we introduced those new pre-test guidelines in physics, we're getting better results at the end of the term – the students are learning more. Clearly the guidelines are working.

Can you think of similar issues your register could help you to check in relation to other additional learning needs?

### Initial parent/whanau information



How does your school first discover that a child has additional learning needs? Obviously this may first be realised as a result of the child's behaviour and learning responses in the classroom. However, many children do arrive at the school gate with those needs already known to the parent or whanau, and this is true at every age level. As we mentioned in Module One, parents and whanau can be far better at identifying some of these needs than we are as teachers, or at least at recognising that a need exists.

For this reason, it's important to check into that family knowledge right from the outset. That means making it easy for the family to share what they know.

*Reminders from Module One:*

- Make sure your school prospectus has a statement about the support provided for students with additional learning needs.
- Check that the prospectus also tells parents and whanau who on the staff can be contacted about this and how to do so.

*Additionally:*

- On your enrolment form, make sure that there is a box where parents and whanau can signal that their child may have additional learning needs. They don't necessarily have to be specific. A possible formula:
  - My child has additional learning needs or abilities
    - These relate to..... *and/or*
    - I would like to talk to you about this
- Remember that parents and whanau with gifted children are often reluctant to use the word "gifted". They are likely to have encountered negative responses in the past when this possibility was raised. The same caveat can sometimes apply to parents of students with other additional needs. Hence the cautious wording for the enrolment form.

### **Your Status Survey**

In your R&P sheet for the first module, we asked you to check whether your school specifically included students with additional learning needs in its vision statement, policy, budget, prospectus, enrolment form or database.

From this module, you now have some additional information to help you check the adequacy of any of these statements. Where you find gaps, you now have some material to help you begin your strategic plan, which will be the final step in this course.

- Three additional questions that might help with this:
  - When was PLD in relation to teaching students with additional learning needs last undertaken for staff in general? What form did it take? Who provided it? Who participated? (If nobody knows, that's useful information too).
  - Are parents and whanau satisfied with provision for their children's special or different needs? How do you know? Is there regular checking on this? Have the students themselves been asked?
  - How do you evaluate the success of any provisions for students with additional learning needs? What is done currently to achieve this?

Check on what's happening in relation to these three issues and record your findings to guide you in your eventual strategic plan.

### **Working with gifted learners – a brief note**

Up until recently, schools wishing to provide for their gifted learners often created the role of Gifted Coordinator. In future, the role of the Learning Support Coordinator will include gifted learners. In order to carry out this aspect of their role, Learning Support Coordinators will need to be able to provide knowledgeable guidance on this topic. The same may equally be true for Gifted Coordinators or other teachers who move into the Learning Support role and find themselves expected to be knowledgeable about other very different additional learning needs.

#### ***Some key statements about gifted learners***

- Gifted children come from *all* sectors of society – from all socio-economic levels, from all ethnic and cultural groups – including Māori –, and from all family situations.
- Giftedness isn't episodic. It's integral. It is present at birth and it is permanent (nature). However, it may, or may not, result in performance, depending on environment and circumstances (nurture).
- Gifted children are a highly *diverse* group. Their exceptional abilities can be in any area of human learning or performance. Few are gifted in all areas of school learning.

- Gifted learners are *alike* in the intensity with which they experience and react to life. Such intensity is a key difference between the responses of gifted learners and their age peers. It has huge consequences for social and emotional development.
- They are also alike in typically having *asynchronous* development, simultaneously being at different stages of development in different aspects. This is potentially a stress factor for them.
- The combination of intense reactions but differing experience means that, in practice, giftedness shows *always* in *behaviour*, but only *sometimes* in *performance*.
- Gifted children are not necessarily high achievers; high achievers are not necessarily gifted.

#### **Four key strategies....**

Obviously teaching gifted learners requires far more information than we can give you here, but four very simple rules of thumb that it may help to know are:



Here's your next R&P page, and resources....

#### **Reflection....**

1. This module began with two different vision statements. Are they saying the same thing, or are there interesting or significant differences between them? Does either prompt new or unexpected thought about your goal as a Coordinator? Could they be combined?
2. Are all qualities and abilities equally valued and provided for in your school? How do you know? Are there some qualities or abilities which are given more priority? Should this be so?
3. How important is it to have a vision statement? Equally important for gifted learners and learners with other different needs? Would it be a good idea to have a combined vision statement for all learners with different learning needs, or would two separate vision statements better meet the students' needs?

#### **Practical Tasks**

1. Review whatever existing vision statements you have found at your school. Are any changes needed? Write these into a new vision statement, and think about how best to introduce these to management and to your teaching colleagues.
2. Locate your school's policy and budget statements with regard to learners with additional learning needs. Do these meet the criteria suggested in the module? Are gifted learners specifically referred to, or included in one overall policy and/or budget? What can you discover about how well the policy statements are being implemented? Do you see any aspects of either policy or budget which need updating?
3. Having read the material on gifted education, how could you adapt/add to/change these key statements to fit your work with learners with other additional needs?

## References

Fraser, P. & Beeby, C. (1939). Dept of Education Annual Report. See:

<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/beeby-vision-today>

Ministry of Education. (2012). *Gifted and Talented Students: Meeting Their Needs in New Zealand Schools*. See: <https://gifted.tki.org.nz/assets/Gifted-and-talented-students-meeting-their-needs-in-New-Zealand-Schools.pdf>

Tapper, L. (2014). "Being in the world of school: A phenomenological exploration of experiences for gifted and talened adolescents". Doctoral dissertation. Canterbury University, Christchurch, New Zealand. Retrieved from:

[https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10092/9057/thesis\\_fulltext.pdf;sequence=5](https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10092/9057/thesis_fulltext.pdf;sequence=5)

### Something to read or watch:

Cathcart, R. (2020). *They're Not Bringing My Brain Out*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edn. Routledge.

Manu Fa'aea Semeatu. Pacific Giftedness and Musical Talent. See:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vn3Ck2Aq5Oo> (20.42 mins).

Dan Peters. Common Characteristics of Gifted Youth. See:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoN2iBDKZxE> (3.40 mins)

Linda Silverman. The Unique Inner Lives of Gifted Children. See:

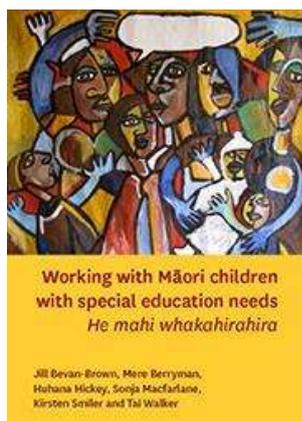
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctYVIYggRfg> (1.08.47)

*Scroll on down to Module Three....*

## Module 3: Critical Issues

In your role as Coordinator, you will naturally be expected to have answers to many different questions about aspects of providing for students with additional learning needs. We can't predict all the questions you'll be asked, but there are some issues which do come up on a fairly regular basis, so we'll try to cover them here.

### Cultural issues



We are becoming more aware of cultural difference, but how does this manifest itself in relation to students with additional learning needs? Fortunately there's an authoritative source guide in this recent book (2015), *Working with Māori children with special education needs – he mahi whakahirahira*, by Jill Bevan-Brown, Mere Berryman, Huana Hickey, Sonja Macfarlane, Kirsten Smiler and Tai Walker, and available through the NZCER. We cannot do better than to quote the following paragraphs from the book's own descriptor:

Who are Māori children with special education needs? Why would working with them be any different to working with other children with special education needs? Why is this a highly important job—

he mahi whakahirahira? This book provides essential information for those striving to provide culturally responsive, effective education for Māori children.

*Working with Māori Children with Special Education Needs* emphasises the importance of learning from the past and listening to Māori children, their parents and wider whānau. It explores the key components of culturally responsive, evidence-based, special education practice; it describes holistic and inclusive responses to educating all tamariki, especially those with identified special education needs; and it discusses a paradigm for Māori disability identity—whānau hauā.

This book also features specific categorial studies, outlining Māori concepts and advising professionals. The studies explore the needs of deaf children and their whānau; outline general, educational and cultural barriers for Māori who are vision impaired or blind; and discuss physical disability, intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, and giftedness from a Māori perspective. This book then considers ways that teachers and whānau can capitalise on their respective strengths and knowledge in order to take joint responsibility for students' learning and behaviour.

#### *Māori who are gifted learners*

One of the authors of this Book, Jill Bevan-Brown, is also one of our leading writers on giftedness amongst Māori, with her work recognised in international publications as well as in New Zealand. Jill draws attention to the very different order of priorities in the Māori perspective on giftedness, with the *qualities* of the individual seen as ranking first, above abilities, linking to the important concept of manaaakitanga and the sense of using one's abilities for others, for the community. It's a prioritising that makes considerable sense – history shows us only too clearly how a person's qualities can determine the use of abilities for good or for selfish or evil ends. Other work by Jill includes:

Bevan-Brown, J.M. (2009). Identifying and providing for gifted and talented Māori students. APEX, 15(4), 6-20. Retrieved online from <http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex>

Bevan-Brown, J. (2003). The cultural self-review. Providing culturally effective, inclusive education for Māori learners. Wellington: NZCER.

Other important writers in this field include Melinda Webber, Angus Macfarlane and Pita and Clare Mahaki.

Mahaki and Mahaki (2007) have developed a list of some of the cultural qualities and associated attributes that are valued by Maori. Some of these qualities could serve as indicators of giftedness, such as:

- manaakitanga: generosity – honouring, caring and giving mana to people, thus maintaining your own mana
- whanaungatanga: family values, relationships
- wairuatanga: balance – harmony, spirituality, being grounded, calm
- kaitiakitanga: caretaker/guardianship of knowledge, environment and resources
- rangatiratanga: ranga – to weave, tira – a company; leadership that inspires unity
- mātauranga: knowledge – intellect, thinking skills, wisdom, education, learned, studious
- te mahi rēhia: recreational pursuits – physical and artistic performance
- tikanga: approved etiquette – correct behaviour

Additional resources on Maori gifted learners and gifted learners from other cultures can be found on the TKI site <https://gifted.tki.org.nz/define-and-identify/cultural-considerations> and in the online Handbook Gifted and Talented Students: Meeting Their Needs in New Zealand Schools (2012) under each of its Components.

## The IEP

You are almost certainly already familiar with the IEP or Individual Education Plan, so this is just a reminder of the value these can have. But in case this is new to you, IEPs are a means of developing an agreed individually constructed programme for students with special learning and behavioural needs.

They are developed by discussion and negotiation with all those working with the student, including the parents and whanau and wherever possible or appropriate the student her or himself. Such plans make it possible to identify and target the student's most significant needs and to provide a basis for monitoring and review. They are now increasingly often recommended for gifted learners too.



Formats differ, but an IEP should:

- identify the specific areas where extra support is needed
- identify also the student's specific strength areas
- assess current performance in both these areas
  - allow for input by parents and whanau and, where appropriate, by students as well as teachers
- set learning goals
  - involve parents/whanau/student/teacher
- list any special resources required
- list any strategies that have proved effective with this student or which are possible new approaches recommended by the research in this field
- set evaluation criteria
- set dates for review.

It may be helpful to build in some regular one-to-one time for the student to meet with the Coordinator or with a teacher with whom the student has a good relationship. That time can be used to check that the student is feeling comfortable with his or her learning progress and with relationships in the regular classroom environment and to develop strategies for managing any issues.

One useful aspect of the IEP is that it can help you in building your communication with the classroom teacher. The IEP can provide a basis for discussing teaching strategies and for supporting the teacher in understanding and coping with behavioural issues. This may mean support beyond the actual IEP meeting if a teacher is struggling to come to terms with what he or she is being asked to do, but the IEP provides a reference point for such discussion, and ideas from any such discussion can feed into the next IEP review meeting.

- Remember to enter the use of an IEP in your register. Keep a record of notes from any IEP discussion and notes on any action taken and its outcome.

### **Differentiating lessons in the classroom**

Classroom teachers may have an understandable concern about creating lessons for students whose capacities fall outside – often well outside – the norm for their age group. There is a perfectly reasonable worry about how time-consuming this could be, and also sometimes an awareness of not having the necessary knowledge or skills. Unfortunately guidelines on differentiation are often lengthy and complex (especially for gifted learners) or do not really cater for the full range of needs the teacher has to deal with.

Perhaps it's true that no one system will ever fully cater for every possible situation; certainly it's true that good teaching always requires some imagination and flexibility.

However, one system which does work across different ability levels is an adaptation of Cathcart's Three-Question Model. This model essentially looks at *how the teacher plans* rather than *what* the teacher plans. It starts by directing the teacher's attention back towards his or her own thinking, encouraging teachers to begin their planning by looking at what they might usually take for granted about the content or relevance of a particular topic. In short, it asks "Why is it valuable for children to know about this?" This apparently simple question can open up fresh vistas for lesson development.

For example, one group of teachers working with a very young age group had decided to study hair as a health topic. Initial planning was around keeping hair healthy and clean. Asking the "why" question led onto thinking about the purpose of having hair and to building understanding and acceptance of individual difference. These questions in turn led onto activities like mapping hair growth on one's head and discovering different patterns of growth for different people, testing the strength of human hair, finding out whether hair is alive, finding out whether hair is the same as fur or as wool, considering the differences between a brush and a comb, learning how to plait, making a comfy hat for a bald man, thinking about the purpose of eyebrows, and so on. There is nothing especially complex about this, but that "why" question prompted a richer approach to the lesson, and one which worked for various levels of ability.

An adapted version of this model expanding from three to four questions to fit all ability levels reads:

1. Why is it valuable for children to learn about this topic?
2. [for *all* children] What *skills* will children need to develop to learn about this topic?

3. [particularly for *gifted* children, because they are first and foremost conceptual learners] What *concepts* will children need to develop to understand this topic in depth?
4. [for *all* children, but at different levels of complexity] What *issues* might arise when considering this topic? How could we use this topic to help children explore and build values?

For example, issues relating to hair included asking “If you could choose, would you rather have hair all over you, like a pussycat, so you didn’t have to worry about buying clothes, or do you like having different clothes to wear?” and, at a different level, “Would it be a good idea if everybody had the same hair colour?” The same approach can be used with students at every age level, including senior high school students. For example, interesting units using this approach have been built around topics like studying Shakespeare and trigonometry.



A key strategy for using this approach effectively lies in building in choice at different levels of ability at every step of the lesson plan. *The essence of differentiation lies in knowing how to create choices.* That’s true even when working with students of more limited cognitive ability. Remember that this model is directed towards the teacher’s own thinking – towards *how* he or she plans. When we support a classroom teacher in learning to use choice as a significant strategy in lesson planning, that teacher is much better placed to provide appropriate material even for students who struggle with basic concepts and decision-making.

Once you have thought your way through these four questions and have begun to generate some ideas for your actual lesson plan, there are various models which can support you in doing this in an orderly way. Such models help you to give structure to your lessons and provide a basis for evaluating student responses. Models can also be helpful in guiding colleagues to try new approaches. Three models you might like to consider are:

1. The **Content – Process – Product Model**: Developed by June Maker, this model looks first at creating a learning environment which encourages students to really stretch themselves, then at modifying content to remove the ceiling on what is learned and encourage a richer and more diverse knowledge base, next at promoting creativity and higher-level cognitive skills, and finally at producing products which reflect the student’s potential.

<https://qtideas.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/the-maker-model-2009.doc>

2. The **Multi-Dimensional Model**: This model, developed in New Zealand, has five steps, based initially on gifted learning needs, but able to be used with all levels of ability. Its steps are (a) “opening our minds”: a challenging introductory question to engage

students; (b) “establishing our data”: a research phase to build a database for further exploration, creation and development; (c) “exploring our ideas”: a hands-on creative and investigative phase; (d) “examining our thinking”: debating and reflecting; and (e) “evaluating our learning”: a final critiquing and assessing phase.

[http://www.giftedreach.org.nz/resources\\_reach\\_model.htm](http://www.giftedreach.org.nz/resources_reach_model.htm)

3. The **Autonomous Learner Model**: Developed by Betts and Kercher, originally for high school students and deserving to be more widely known in this country, this model has a particular focus on supporting students towards becoming responsible, creative, independent, life-long learners – in other words, becoming an autonomous learner, solving problems and developing new ideas through a combination of divergent and convergent thinking, with minimal external guidance. It has five key “dimensions”: (a) orientation, (b) individual development; (c) enrichment; (d) the use of seminars; and (e) in-depth studies.

<https://growingthegifted.blogspot.com/2014/11/the-autonomous-learner-model.html>

If you are working with young children, you might also find it useful to check Margrain, V., Murphy, C. & Dean, D. (eds), (2015): *Giftedness in the Early Years: Informing, Learning and Teaching* (Wellington: NZCER Press). Chapter 9, by Caterina Murphy looks particularly at teaching strategies for this age group, supported with case studies.

### Grouping and acceleration

Two issues which frequently prompt divided opinion, particularly in relation to gifted learners, are whether or not to group and whether or not to accelerate. Those who query the need for grouping often express a fear of elitism, of making other children feel less worthwhile, of the gifted child either becoming unacceptably convinced of his or her superiority or, alternatively, of being made to feel embarrassed and uncomfortable by being “singled out”. Those who query acceleration very frequently express a fear that the child will be left socially stranded amongst older children, perhaps exposed to social behaviours inappropriate for his or her age.



Research simply does not support any of these concerns. There has been extensive research by many people over decades which again and again has found that both grouping and acceleration are essential components for this group of learners. This research has recently been summarised in a very comprehensive paper entitled “What One Hundred Years of Research Says About the Effects of Ability Grouping and Acceleration on K--12 Students’ Academic Achievement: Findings of Two Second-Order Meta-Analyses,” available at:

[https://tip.duke.edu/sites/default/files/atoms/files/TIP%20Acceleration%20and%20Ability-Grouping%20Summary\\_Dec%206\\_2016.pdf](https://tip.duke.edu/sites/default/files/atoms/files/TIP%20Acceleration%20and%20Ability-Grouping%20Summary_Dec%206_2016.pdf) .

The worries that people express often relate to the way in which grouping and acceleration are handled. When one student is taken out of class to do something different others don’t get access to, then, as sure as sunrise, feelings are going to be aroused, from curiosity through to jealousy – no wonder there’s research too on how often gifted students get bullied. Yet the reality is that gifted children need – just like every other child – the opportunity to learn and play with others who function just like they do, ask the same sorts of questions, get highly interested in the same sorts of things, tell similar jokes, even understand the same words: the regular classroom can be a very lonely place for a gifted child without that kind of companionship. And because gifted children are *already* different

and often just don't "fit" with age peers, they will often feel far more naturally comfortable with older students or adults than with their own age group.

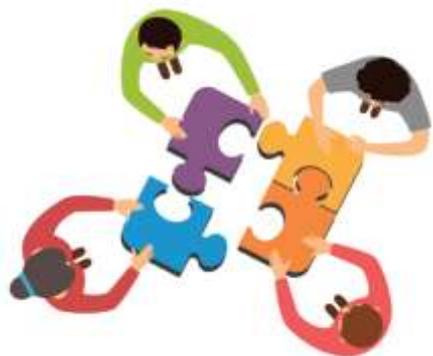
That doesn't mean it's all as easy as popping a name on a list. Particularly for acceleration, such a move suits some students better than others. It has to be an individual decision, and an IEP is a sensible approach. Also with acceleration, it's not enough *only* to place the child with an older age group: learning material must still be differentiated to provide for the gifted student's more conceptual understanding and greater need for challenge and depth. Care also needs to be taken with grouping. Especially at high school level, some schools have a history of very obviously treating advanced placement classes as classes for the school's stars or most valued students, hardly an approach in the best long-term interests of either those students or their more ordinarily able fellows.

Speaking more generally, one of the key ways of helping teachers to avoid a situation where one student seems to be getting special treatment lies very simply in something we've already said – encouraging teachers to build more choice into their lessons. When that is part of what normally happens in a classroom, a student who is working differently does not stand out so noticeably. As some schools have found, the same principle can apply to creating advanced placement classes.

*We've discussed these two issues in relation to gifted learners. What similar issues can affect other different additional learning needs? How aware are teachers of these issues? How are these issues dealt with in the school's provision for these students? What opportunity do you as Coordinator have to update your knowledge around research and best practice in relation to these issues? That leads us on to the next topic....*

### **Bringing your colleagues on board**

In Module One, we discussed the need to build communication links with all the various groups of people who have some part to play in the learning support process. Your colleagues in the classroom obviously form one critically important group. The classroom teacher is often the first person to realise that a student needs some form of extra learning support, and when that student is spending all or part of the time in the classroom, then the classroom teacher should have at least a basic knowledge of how that student's condition impacts on his or her learning needs and what strategies can help to meet those needs in the classroom situation.



Thus as Coordinator, it's part of your role to ensure that teachers do have this information. A sensible starting point is to check that classroom teachers understand exactly what your role is – and how their role fits into this. This is very necessary – as some Coordinators have found, busy teachers may assume that once a student has been identified as needing extra support, it's entirely up to the Coordinator to provide whatever is required.

So, first of all, what do your colleagues already know (or assume) about who you are and what you do?

- Do teachers know when or why it's appropriate to contact you?
- Do they know how to contact you?
- Do they know what kinds of support you can provide?

Create a short survey to explore this. Make it straightforward enough that it can be answered in just five minutes or so at a staff meeting. A checklist format with “tick as many of the following as apply” is the easiest approach, and the responses give you a basis for developing some material that can go into every staff folder to ensure every teacher has the answers to these basic questions.

This is of course an ongoing issue. New teachers come into the school and need that information too, and existing staff become less aware of your role if they don't happen to be directly involved with you for some time.

So part of your communication strategy involves maintaining that awareness. How can you do that? Just as you've made it your regular practice to send a report to your BOT, look to create a regular staff meeting slot for yourself too, perhaps once a month. Negotiate this with school management as an accepted part of your job description. And then use that slot as imaginatively as you can. For example:

- Share an example of work achieved by a student receiving extra learning support, and list any special strategies or prompts you used in working with that student which could also be used by a classroom teacher.
- Share an example of work achieved in the classroom by such a student, congratulate the teacher involved, and ask him or her to comment on any specific strategies used to help the student.
- When you have a new resource item or realise that a useful resource item is gathering dust, bring it to a staff meeting, demonstrate its use, and, if appropriate, involve teachers in having a little trial on the spot.
- From time to time, share some of the information that's specific to your role. For example, one month you might give an overview of some aspect of the data collected via your learning support register and of what the data tells you – for instance, perhaps your data shows an interesting discrepancy between boys and girls in relation to recognition of hearing issues. Why might that be? How could that be corrected? Or perhaps your data shows that teachers have become better at identifying gifted Māori children after an earlier report had shown this to be an issue, so there's confirmation for the new approach that's been taken to this, and pats on the back are due.
- Another possibility is to use this time slot to discuss an assessment tool you use. What's it designed to do? Can classroom teachers use it themselves, or does it need your specialist knowledge? How should teachers interpret the results you report back to them?

Such a monthly time slot does not need to be lengthy, but it can be very effective in keeping not just your work but the needs of the students you work with clearly in the awareness of the classroom teacher.

### Finally...

There will be other issues that come your way, difficult problems and sometimes difficult people! But your clarity about your own role and the links you establish with colleagues, including school management, will be a strong source of support for you in dealing with such issues.



## References

- Bevan-Brown, J. (2005) Providing a culturally responsive environment for gifted Māori learners. *International Education Journal*, 6 (2), 150-155.
- Bevan-Brown, J.M. (2009). Identifying and providing for gifted and talented Māori students. *APEX*, 15(4), 6-20. Retrieved online from <http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex/>
- Bevan-Brown, J. (2015). Gifted Māori children: Nurturing sturdy kauri. In J. Bevan-Brown, M. Berryman, H. Hickey, S. Macfarlane, K. Smiler, & T. Walker (Eds.), *Working with Māori children with special education needs: He mahi whakahirahira* (pp. 216–240). Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER Press.
- Cathcart, R. (2010). *Differentiation Made Practical*. Invercargill: Essential Resources.
- Heacox, D. (2009). *Making Differentiation a Habit: How to Ensure Success in Academically Diverse Classrooms*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing
- Macfarlane, A. (2004) *Kia hiwa ra! Listen to Culture - Māori students' plea to educators*. Wellington: NZCER. (Includes the Educultural Wheel)
- Mahaki, P. & Mahaki, C. (2007). Mana tu, Mana ora: Identifying characteristics of Māori giftedness. Retrieved from <https://gifted.tki.org.nz/define-and-identify/characteristics-of-the-gifted-and-talented/>
- Ministry of Education. (2012). Gifted and talented students. Meeting their needs in New Zealand schools. Retrieved from <https://www.gifted.tki.org.nz/assets/Gifted-and-talented-students-meeting-their-needs-in-New-Zealand-Schools.pdf>
- Murphy, C. (2015). Opening the treasure chest: Differentiation for young children who are gifted. In V. Margrain, C. Murphy, & J. Dean (Eds.), *Giftedness in the early years: informing, learning and teaching* (pp. 14-47). Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER Press.
- Steenbergen-Hu, S., Olszewski-Kubilius, P., Makel, M.C. (2016). What one hundred years of research says about the effects of ability grouping and acceleration on k-12 students' academic achievement: Findings of two second-order meta-analyses. (Summary). Retrieved from: <https://tip.duke.edu/sites/default/files/atoms/files/TIP%20Acceleration%20and%20Ability-Grouping%20Summary%20Dec%202016.pdf>



## Reflection

Surveying the range of topics covered in this module, how does this coverage relate to your existing concept of your role as a Gifted or Learning Support Coordinator? Have you identified any areas where you feel you will need more knowledge or skills? Could you use this module to help you plan the next steps in your own professional development journey?

## Practical Tasks

1. Take a look at the ethnic and cultural make-up of your school roll, and then compare this with the ethnic and cultural make-up of your identified gifted cohort. Are they approximately in balance, or is it apparent that disproportionately few students of Māori or other non-European ethnicity have been identified?
  - a. If you do find an imbalance, particularly of Māori or Pasifika students, the readings suggested earlier will help you, but it is crucially important that you seek the guidance of local elders. Without their support and their insights, your effectiveness will be limited. Be prepared for it to take some time to establish trust.
  - b. Repeat this process in relation to other different learning needs.
2. Check out your school's IEP process. Could the existing format cover the different needs of gifted students, or will you need to make some format changes?

3. Differentiating material: this is clearly a major topic: trial the strategies suggested here, but consider whether this area should be built into your own ongoing professional development journey.
4. Does your school have policies on either grouping or acceleration of gifted students? After you've gone through the suggested readings, how well-informed are those existing policies? What changes might need to be made?
5. Carry out the short survey suggested in the module as a way of finding out how well your colleagues understand your role. Based on your results, plan over time some of the activities suggested to help get your colleagues on board.

### ***Comment***

This module has obviously covered a very wide territory. No-one expects you to deal with everything it has covered within the next week! But the material included here should help you:

- (a) to identify areas where change is needed
- (b) to set your priorities in order
- (c) to begin to plan both a short and a long-term development plan for your school
- (d) to set your own professional development goals to help you fulfil your Coordinator role effectively and satisfyingly.

## Module 4: Developing Your Strategic Plan

In this final module, we are going to look at aspects of building a strategic plan for your school, and then we'll consider that vital question, where to from here? Our hope is that collectively we can come up with some exciting answers to that question!

### Defining the strategic plan....

A strategic plan is a way of making sure that you have a clearly articulated objective and have developed a set of purposeful and relevant actions to help you reach that objective within a stated time frame. It helps to ensure that everyone involved shares the same understandings, and it provides a basis for assessing progress and making adjustments where necessary.

Various frameworks exist for creating a strategic plan. The three questions in the little diagram below are an excellent starting point, though we need to add a fourth – “How well did we do it?” More specifically, key ingredients in a strategic plan are usually:

[1] A vision statement, which defines your ultimate aims and the values that guide you. It acts as the basic reference point for decision-making.

[2] An assessment of the current situation – many frameworks use a SWOT analysis – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. (What might “threats” be in a teaching situation? Not physical, but perhaps issues such as negative stereotypes about students with additional learning needs?)

[3] Setting the specific goals, allied to a time-line – rather than working *forward* in short steps, some frameworks suggest first looking at your goal three years out and working *back* from there, to help break the process down into manageable steps.

[4] Developing your staged “operations plan” – the series of actions you will take.

[5] Identifying relevant KPIs – Key Performance Indicators to guide assessment of progress.

[6] A review timeline and process.

A strategic plan might also list the personnel who need to be involved at each stage and include reference to the financial implications of the plan.

### A strategic plan for your school

In the previous modules, we have looked at many factors related to the role of Learning Support Coordinator or Gifted Coordinator. We can now draw these factors together to



create the basis for a strategic plan. Your first step will be your “SWOT” analysis – identifying what’s working well, what needs to be added and what needs to change.

It can be helpful to group the factors you need to look at under the following headings:

[1] the philosophical basis:

- vision statement – leadership – communication

[2] the practical framework

- policy – budget – register – IEPs – forms of provision and teaching strategies

[3] the personnel

- BOT/management – staff – parents/whanau/students – inter-school links

[4] evaluating outcomes

- collecting data – evaluating data – planning forward.



### ***The philosophical basis***

You’ve already looked at your school’s vision statement. It should be the foundation for decision-making about learning support for students with additional learning needs. If the existing vision statement doesn’t seem to cover this adequately, then where will you build a revision into your plan? You may want to raise this as a question now with BOT and management, but plan also to re-visit this after there has been time for some PLD with your colleagues.

Leadership is included under this heading because this is about perceptions – firstly your own perception of your role, and then about how BOT, management and colleagues perceive and respond to your role. How comfortable are you with your own and others’ acceptance of this aspect?

Communication could fit under every heading, but it’s included here first of all because it’s so central to your ability to be effective in this role. So how well are those communication links developing?

### ***The practical framework***

Draw on the information you gathered in your practical tasks to assess the current status of your policy, budget, IEP use and register. Is there any need for further development or change? What provision is there for future developments?

In Module Three, we discussed issues around teaching strategies and forms of provision. Does what’s in place now fit with what research indicates, or is there need for further development?

### ***Personnel***

Again, draw on the information you have gathered to assess whether each concerned party has adequate access to the information relevant to their role in supporting the student with additional learning needs. Are there gaps in the provision of information?

Have all staff had PLD relevant to their roles? How recently? What has your interaction with staff indicated about attitudes towards students with additional learning needs? About understanding of additional learning needs? How about your own PLD – what opportunities have you had, and what’s your own plan for continuing learning in your field?

What opportunities exist for interacting with parents and whanau? For hearing student voice? Are these opportunities actually being used?

### *A SWOT analysis*

Before we look at evaluating outcomes, a brief example of a SWOT analysis might be:

*Strengths:* Principal and DP are strongly supportive of the Learning Support Coordinator and treat her as an integral member of the management team.

*Weaknesses:* There has been no PLD for staff on any aspect of additional learning needs for about five years.

*Opportunities:* An expert on an aspect of learning support for additional learning needs is in town for a conference and has agreed to run an after-school workshop for staff.

*Threats:* The BOT is reluctant to grant the funding needed to extend the Learning Support Coordinator's hours from one day per week to two, believing that some additional computers for classrooms should have greater priority.

Obviously an actual analysis would have much more content, but this brief example shows how the analysis could contribute to a relevant strategic plan.

### **Evaluating outcomes**

You may want to use tools like the Ministry's PACT or, if you are happy with spreadsheets, the Visible Learning and Progress Achievement Tool is one example (available from <https://www.visiblelearningplus.com/groups/progress-vs-achievement-tool>). (You will need to subscribe to this website to access it – but it's free).

But there are other measures too, and for students whose learning needs fall outside the usual range, some less common measures can be more appropriate or can add valuable information not picked up through the more usual methods.

- Remember in Module Two we talked about the various uses of a register. There's a wealth of information in a well-maintained register, and it makes sense to use this data as part of your evaluation process.
- Surveys and questionnaires can be very valuable tools. For example, REACH Education uses a short 10-item questionnaire to help a school discover how well informed (or otherwise) its staff are about gifted learners. It's very basic, but it's a useful indicator. Nine items include statements, some of which are true and some of which are false stereotypes, and teachers are asked to decide which is which. The tenth item lists nine different identification tools and asks teachers to state which of these items they think their school uses. Responses to this item often interestingly range from none to all nine – very telling for the strategic plan!
- Surveys sometimes provide qualitative information you can't get in any other way. For example, when a particular gifted programme was required to report to the Ministry on its effectiveness, it surveyed parents on factors such as whether their children were now happier at school, had found friends for the first time through



meeting ability peers, had re-discovered interest in learning, and so on. The unanimity of the responses was very convincing. (One interesting finding was that on the day of their programme, the children were generally first out of bed and urging parents to hurry up – *most* unlike other days!)

- Children can be asked for their comments too. (See the report form at the end of this module, used by the One Day School programme even with its youngest children).

### Putting it all together

Once you collate all this information, you are then able to construct your strategic plan. The practice of first setting your eventual aim and working back from there seems sensible, but you will of course need to set short term goals too – perhaps the first term, then the first year, and so on.

As far as possible, include your colleagues in developing the strategic plan and setting goals – the more involved people feel, the more support you are likely to receive.

At all stages you need to be prepared to re-visit your plan, and that means of course re-checking data where you'd identified a need for change or development.

Don't forget to include progress on the strategic plan in your reports to BOT and management, and also to staff and, where appropriate, to parents and whanau.

### Where to from here?



One of the major purposes of this booklet is to support you in growing the status of the Learning Support Coordinator or Gifted Coordinator as a valued and integral part of the organisation and functioning of the school, included in policy and decision-making, and properly recognised within budgetary and time allocations.

Achieving this is a process which may take time. The measures we have suggested throughout these modules should support you in building this recognition, beginning with those crucial communication links. Steps towards this outcome will form part of your strategic plan.

Another purpose of this booklet is to support you in beginning to build collegial networks beyond your school with teachers in other schools in your community or region who hold the same role as you do.

Such networking is particularly valuable if you are the only person in your school with specific responsibility for a field such as additional learning needs. Linking with others with similar responsibilities creates the very necessary opportunity for informed discussion, for sharing strategies that have worked, for seeking ideas from the experience of others, for simply at times having a moan with others who understand!

In fact, a network potentially has many functions. Firstly, it provides opportunities for professional development. The obvious possibility is to organise a workshop presentation by an expert in the field, but other possibilities include:

- a shared demonstration day when network members each bring along an example of some activity they have tried which has worked particularly well
  - different kinds of additional needs could be targeted on different days

- a shared “issues” day, with a specific issue nominated in advance for discussion of possible solutions and strategies and the sharing of relevant resources
- sending one member (or possibly two) to a significant conference or other event outside the local area and providing for this person (or people) to report back to the network
- organising a mini-conference of your own – this may sound like a huge responsibility, but a one-day event with perhaps just four workshops is relatively easy to arrange once your network is up and running.

Every such event is also an opportunity to grow your network.

A network might also provide a platform for advocacy. Your network allows you to collect data on how learning support for students with additional needs is being provided across your local area or region. Such data could then inform a presentation to, for example, a principals’ association, pointing out a relevant local finding – for instance, perhaps you’ve found a big discrepancy in the hours different schools allot to this or perhaps most schools seem reluctant to use a particular resource or strategy and you want to encourage principals to take a more informed look at this, and so on.

A local network might very usefully organise a parent meeting linked to a specific area of additional learning needs. Such meetings can:

- provide an opportunity to ensure parents and whanau are well informed about what schools are doing for their children
- present a speaker who can share up-to-date research on the conditions their children are experiencing and/or practical ideas on providing support at home
- lead to the formation of parent support groups
  - one such group, alerted to a lack of funding, raised funds to buy resources for teachers and, separately, to send a teacher to an important conference
- generate organisational potential amongst parents and whanau which can sometimes link with the teacher network to support the organisation of some further events.

Local networks can also link with larger regional networks and with national bodies as a source of information and expertise. Larger networks or national bodies may have newsletters or magazines local networks can access for their members, or may run online Q&A forums local network members can use, and often are the organisers of larger events beyond the capacity of a local network to run but very relevant for them.

Networks can also be used to arrange events for children, including competitions and performance. However, this is not an effort recommended for a fledgling network! But once a network is well established and has some experience under its belt in arranging other events, then this may be a possibility.

### **Making it happen**

Many networks start with enthusiasm but gradually fall apart. Why is this? Can it be avoided? A Ministry of Education survey found that networks essentially failed most often because they were dependent on busy teachers voluntarily doing all the organisation required. Furthermore, most networks had only the funding they could obtain from their members and this was simply not enough to employ even a part-time organiser or to pay any major cost such as a fee for a top-line speaker.





- Include information about significant PLD opportunities, recognising the role such networks can play in encouraging participation in such events.
- You can vary the type of main feature you offer in a number of ways. For example, a member might have attended an international conference and be willing to present a detailed report. An expert in some aspect of additional learning needs might be prepared to answer questions forwarded in advance. Someone might have videoed an interesting session working with children that they're willing to share. Your wider network established through this course might have ideas or resources they are happy to share – and you in turn may also be happy to contribute material to others in this network. And so on!

The point about all these types of activities is that they involve much less time for the organising team, don't involve finding a venue, don't usually involve a cost, and don't require tired teachers to travel after school in order to take part.

**Face-to-face meetings:** This does not mean that you need to abandon face-to-face meetings altogether. On the contrary, people do enjoy and benefit from such direct personal contact. The question is how to make it manageable for organisers. If you have an effective computerised link working on a regular basis as described above, it's not unreasonable to think about just one or two face-to-face meetings during the year, with perhaps just one main speaker and lots of opportunity for members to meet and talk with each other.

You'll need to fix a cost for this of course – the speaker's fee and costs, food (afternoon tea? lunch?), possibly venue costs – but this shouldn't be huge. Your computerised link covers your PR, but a small charge to members may still be necessary.

- Think about the possibility of using such an event to re-connect with any schools where you don't currently have a member. Encourage them to send someone along to participate and hopefully then join your network.

Such a meeting also creates the opportunity for an annual review of what the network has accomplished during the year and to seek feedback from your members. It's also the time when you and your team decide whether to commit yourself for a further year or to seek others to join the team or to replace you. No-one should feel joining a committee has to mean lifelong commitment!

**Other supports:** Make sure that you are aware of other related networks and associations working regionally or nationally. Your network should consider membership of national associations, particularly where they offer services such as journals, libraries and annual conferences. These associations are also sometimes important political lobbyists, and belonging to them can mean you are in touch with emerging developments and may even have an opportunity for some input. There will be a membership fee, but this is not usually great and you may be able to have this paid through your own school budget since it is directly relevant to your own work.

More locally, remember too the possibility of working with parents and whanau, not just to support them, but to receive their support and sometimes their practical help for your own work.

### **A final reflection.....**

We have come now to the end of this short booklet. Much of our focus has been practical rather than conceptual, a deliberate choice reflecting the fact that discussion around practical strategies for leading and achieving change in our colleagues is so rarely included in teacher education, or at least not before principal level. Yet it is exactly these kinds of

apparently simple strategies which are used by effective leaders and changemakers in many fields of human activity.

However strategies by themselves are not enough. Their successful use depends first and foremost on the individual who is advocating them. That person has to be fired by a strong commitment to the cause they are advocating before they can successfully light that fire in others. But it must be a commitment which reflects thought, knowledge and understanding as well as passion.



That's why it's so important to have a clear vision about what you ultimately see as the outcome you are reaching for and a sound basis of experience and knowledge to underpin the steps you advocate towards reaching that outcome.

And that's why it's so important to build those communication links – to listen, to hear, to share, and ultimately to encourage and inspire.

Transformational leaders in all fields have these qualities. But you do not have to be a Nelson Mandela or a Mahatma Gandhi, or, for that matter, a young Sam Johnson leading his fellow students to extraordinary efforts following the Christchurch earthquakes.

Transformational leadership happens within our communities and within our schools when someone cares enough and knows enough to seek to lead change.

Remember this quote from Module One?

Leadership is a way of thinking, a way of acting, and, most importantly, a way of communicating.

And also:

The days of the principal as the lone instructional leader are over.

As Learning Support Coordinator or as a Gifted Coordinator – or, indeed, as a SENCO or RTLB – you too need to be a leader in your school, a valued staff member in a role recognised as relevant to the entire school and a respected participant in school decision-making. The strategies we have shown you in this booklet are the tools to help you build that leadership role, realising in your individual and collective practice the goal that drives the very concept of Learning Support Coordinator or Gifted Coordinator.

***Scroll down for your final reflection and task, and some interesting reading....***

## Reading

[www.educationalleaders.govt.nz](http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz) – see what our own Ministry recommends! Some thought-provoking commentary at this site.

And for another approach, see this website:

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-transformational-leadership-2795313>

*You can find plenty of other material on leadership via the internet, but much of it relates to business rather than education. There are educational leadership journals, but you might also find it interesting to tap into Teacher College Record which has weekly issues online with short articles and reviews on numerous aspects of education, often concerning leadership and management questions. You can find this journal at [www.tcrecord.org](http://www.tcrecord.org). Some recent topics from one issue:*

- *School turnaround through scaffolded craftsmanship*
- *Demoralised: why teachers leave the profession they love and how they can stay*
- *Caribbean discourse in inclusive education*
- *Reclaiming accountability in teacher education*
- *Engaging youth in school.*



## Reflection

Has your concept of your own potential role as a leader changed as you've been reading these modules? What would you see as the key qualities you need to have to fulfil this role going forward?

## Practical tasks

You have two major tasks now.

The first is to complete your strategic plan. Look back through these modules and make sure you have included all the areas we have covered.

- What's working now?
- What needs to be added or improved?

Then draft your timetable for implementing your plan.

- Set priorities.
- Set a time scale, both short and long term.
- Identify who should be involved.
- Identify the resources you will need.
- Remember to make provision for reviewing progress on a regular basis – at least once a year.

Your second task is to present your strategic plan to your school management and gain their documented approval.

- Link your plan to the school's vision statement.
- Link also to Ministry requirements for meeting student needs.
- Where appropriate, support each step by reference to research in the field. (For example, with reference to grouping).

- Have a clear statement of expected outcomes and benefits for school and students.
- Make sure you have costed each step of your plan.
- Ensure your presentation will be given an appropriate and sufficient time slot (minimum of 45 minutes) and that every member of the management team knows this item is on the agenda.
- Have an individual summary of your plan for each member of the management team.

And remember, change takes time...

Our very best wishes!

***Scroll down again for that report form.....***

## A school report for our programme!

Your teacher writes a report on you...  
... now it's YOUR turn to write a report!

- \* Please give our programme a mark out of 10 on the interest scale
- \* Please write your "report comments" for each of the questions below.

[1] How much does your mind get s-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-d here?

.....

.....

[2] Is the work hard enough for you?

.....

.....

[3] Do you feel okay about sharing your ideas when you are here?

.....

.....

[4] What are the best things about belonging to the programme?

.....

.....

[5] Is there anything you would like to change about the programme, or anything you think we could do better?

.....

.....

[6] Do you think we should keep running this programme? What advice would you give the principal about this?

.....

.....



*Please feel free to write any extra comments you would like to share with us on the back of this sheet. Thank you!*

**Interest**

**Scale**

10

9

8

7

6

5

4

3

2

1

0

