

A model of needs for gifted learners

A good model for teaching in any field is based on the work of researchers and experienced practitioners. It gives us specific direction for planning, and it helps us to see *why* particular strategies are necessary or valuable and *why* they work while others don't. Thus it helps us to make good choices about what we do.

The REACH model of needs is a student-centred, holistic framework that helps teachers to understand the very different needs gifted learners bring to the classroom. It gives teachers a sound knowledge basis for planning lessons that include gifted learners. It is linked to a raft of practical and teacher-friendly strategies. It is built around five key areas:

[1] **Generating a high level of interest in learning** – Gifted learners have a capacity for intense and productive interest, but are often bored by routine schoolwork. So we recognise the need to re-capture and maintain high interest.

[2] **Developing the five “tools of thought”** – Gifted learners are capable of working far ahead of age peers in their areas of ability, but need to be given opportunities to learn the advanced skills necessary to such advanced work. So we identify the skills most relevant to this, both the obvious and the not-so-obvious.

[3] **Developing intellectual and creative potential** – Central to our work with gifted learners, we seek to recognise and explore their capacity, not only to master the known and expected, but also, ultimately, to go *beyond* the known, to achieve new understandings and fresh insights.

[4] **Fostering emotional, social, ethical and spiritual development** – This gives balance and depth to our planning. Through this component we recognise the human needs of gifted children as well as their intellectual and creative abilities. Learning itself is put into the context of human experience; we seek to support children in their growth towards a caring concern for others.

[5] **Evaluating our learning** – This is the final step in preparing gifted learners to become independent thinkers, innovators and creators. Thus we support gifted learners in developing the skills needed to build and then work towards fulfilling their life vision.

The REACH model was originally developed by our director in the mid-80s. At that stage it had just the first four steps. The fifth step, evaluating our learning, was added as a sensible suggestion by Sue Barriball, Lead Teacher, when it was used at One Day School. The inclusion of spiritual development was added as we grew in our awareness of Māori perspectives and of their relevance and value for understanding giftedness in the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

