

Observations On How An Online Gifted Program From New Zealand Supported The Challenges Faced By An Academically Gifted Child.

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

Gifted children are often perceived to be geniuses; thus, the thinking is that they may not face any challenges when learning. The truth is that as gifted as they are, they do face challenges when learning. An observation has shown that the different challenges faced are being decreased by an online program. The program is offering an advanced curriculum that is more challenging with advanced coursework to engage and continue the intellectual growth of gifted children. The program also teaches acceleration topics to help in advancing more rapidly in areas where the gifted child excels. It provides access to a wealth of educational resources, including digital libraries, research databases, and educational tools that may not be readily available in traditional schools. The teachers teaching in the program are experienced and well trained in gifted education and can support the gifted children. The support and partial work done in the program is summarized and the results on how engaged the gifted child is with the program is measured. Some suggestion for the improvement for the program is being proposed.

Keywords: Gifted Children, Underachievement, Boredom

INTRODUCTION

Gifted and talented education is considered essential, and this is perhaps unique to New Zealand, to provide differentiated learning experiences across a continuum of approaches, beginning in inclusive classrooms, where there has been a series of initiatives over the past years to ensure an appropriate education is provided for young gifted and talented New Zealanders [1]. Other countries have different types of programs for gifted children, whereas, in Singapore, the programs are meant to develop intellectual depth and higher-level thinking while nurturing productive creativity, developing attitudes for self-directed lifelong learning, enhancing aspirations for individual excellence and fulfillment, developing a strong social conscience and commitment to serve society and the nation and develop moral values and qualities for responsible leadership [2]. As for Australia, through evidence-based leadership, advocacy, collaboration, education, and communication, the AAEGT (Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented) strives for the vision that all gifted students across the nation be recognized and have their intellectual and affective needs met through appropriate educational provision [3]. In the USA, the John Hopkins Centre for Gifted and Talented core mission is to serve bright learners and their families through their renowned programs, research, counseling services, and advocacy in identifying and developing the talents of advanced pre-university students to better the world today, to improve it for generations to come (The Johns Hopkins Centre for Talented Youth, 2020). Malaysia also has its gifted program, which was set by a recommendation put forward by the Education Planning and Research Department of MOE (Ministry of Education) which emphasized the necessity to institute a special school for gifted and talented students, or at least the formation of gifted classes in the normal school system, to realize the nation's vision to become an industrialized country and this was later supported with the establishment of two face to face local gifted programs in 2009 and 2010, by the names of PERMATApintar™ and PERMATAinsan™ [5], which are currently are known as GENIUS@Pintar™ and GENIUS@Insan™.

An observation was made by the parents of a 9 year old boy that is gifted in mathematics and science, where

the child is more interested in topics or subjects related to his giftedness. The child has social challenges and has less interest in learning or doing activities that do not involve his giftedness. Arts, literature, compositions and comprehensions, and non-logical matters do not interest him. Everything he sees is factual and fantasies irrelevant to the mind are often shunned from his thoughts. He has been attending NZCGE classes for 3 years.

CHALLENGES FACED BY GIFTED CHILDREN

There are a few challenges faced by gifted children and these challenges can cause behavior problems and regression in the gifted child. A holistic therapist in private practice in Massachusetts, Julia M. Chamberlain, MS, INHC, LMHC has stated that gifted children may be under-stimulated or bored in typical social or education settings, which may result in behavior disputes like school refusal, tantrums, distractibility, or general acting out.

A. Underachievement

Underachieving is a problem most gifted child faces when attending school and the investigated issue found out that gifted children who were not provided with appropriate levels of a challenge since elementary school, usually will have this problem. It was found that classrooms do not constantly offer an intellectually stimulating environment for gifted and talented children to succeed [6]. Most of them underachieve by default as they could not receive the academic content or instruction required to reach their potential in school. Some find that regular classroom time is frequently unproductive for them [7]. Many gifted children in elementary school would know as much as half of the material to be covered in their current grade before the start of the school year [6].

B. Boredom

Gifted children often become bored in traditional school and a survey of 50 families with gifted children that has autism, showed that 78% of them find that the syllabus taught is boring at school as the students are likely to be more advanced than the syllabus given as the school is grouping the different syllabus by age rather than by IQ, while 35% families saw deterioration in their gifted child academics [8]. A different study that was done by the Council of Curriculum, Examinations, and Assessment (CCEA) in 2008, showed that some parents have seen their gifted children facing problems in academics and that their academic does decline day by day.

C. Social Issues

Social issues are not new challenges for gifted children, and the social struggles they face are rooted in their intense emotionality [9]. Their advanced skill often dictates an intense sense of what they consider right and wrong, leading to outbursts, tantrums, and an inability to see their peer’s views, which can cause other students to withdraw from being friends with them. Parents and educators often stress that gifted children need to be in same-age classrooms to advance socially. If they are grouped based on their common intellectual ability, there are thoughts that they will not interact with others in society at large [10].

II. MINDPLUS ONLINE™ IN NEW ZEALAND CENTRE FOR GIFTED EDUCATION (NZCGE)

The New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education provides nationwide support for gifted children 2-13 years of age, where the centre has nurtured the talents of thousands of gifted children, and given expert support to gifted children, in addition to their parents and teachers [11]. They have an online module, MindPlus Online™, a 45-minute online session for gifted 6–13-year-olds that provides intellectual, creative, social, and emotional learning and support with a specialist educator, where the programs are designed for students who cannot access a face-to-face program with additional learning opportunities and who wish to work with a group of like-minded peers [12]. The MindPlus Online™ classes apply the NZCGE curriculum (Table 1) that is meant for gifted children and the benefits of the participants are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 1 NZCGE Curriculum adapted from (NZCGE (New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education), 2021)

NZCGE Curriculum	
Purpose and Scope	<p>The special learning, social and emotional needs of gifted learners are best met through a continuum of provision delivered beyond the regular classroom need to be guided by a specialized and differentiated curriculum developed to target specific needs of gifted learners that are difficult to meet within the regular classroom.</p> <p>The NZCGE Curriculum is a specialized, differentiated curriculum that expands on the New Zealand Curriculum and is designed to help meet some of the needs of intellectually and creatively gifted learners in New Zealand, particularly those that are best met within a part-time withdrawal context.</p> <p>Its purpose is to guide teaching and learning for preschool, primary, and</p>

NZCGE Curriculum	
	secondary level programs delivered by NZCGE, outside and alongside the regular classroom.
Principles	NZCGE follows eight principles, and these are the foundation of the specialized curriculum decision making, which are the essence of the educational experience that is provided for the gifted learners that are learner-centered and apply equally to every aspect of the specialized curriculum: personalization challenge collaboration the Treaty of Waitangi strength focus holistic focus authentic learning future focus
Curriculum Aims	Students interact with learners of like-mind over time to develop an understanding of self and others as gifted individuals: explore and develop strengths, talents, interests, and passions. develop and engage in complex and abstract thinking. build self-direction and autonomy in learning. develop and use sophisticated learning processes
Learning Strand	Learning strands in the NZCGE Curriculum include three content strands and three process strands: Content Strands: Personal Development Research, Conceptual Development, Talent Development Process Strands: Research, Complex Thinking, Communication

TABLE 2 Why MindPlus Online™ is great for gifted children adapted from (NZCGE (New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education), 2021)

Benefits	
MindPlus Online™ NZCGE	MindPlus Online™ connects gifted children with like-minded peers, providing them with an online learning and social support network
	MindPlus Online™ students connect with a specialist teacher who knows how to get the best from an online learning environment and who understands gifted learners and what makes them tick.
	MindPlus Online™ learning is challenging and stretches children’s abilities and ways of thinking.
	MindPlus Online™ students can negotiate their learning pathway, catering to individual strengths and interests.

III. SUPPORT FROM MINDPLUS ONLINE™ FROM NZCGE

Some students may underachieve as a direct result of an inappropriate and unmotivating curriculum, where the students make intentional decisions not to put their best efforts into schoolwork that fails either to motivate, engage or challenge them [13] and as the NZCGE has their tailored curriculum that motivates, engages, and challenges the student, it helps to curb the underachievement faced by the gifted children. The teachers teaching the NZCGE classes are well-trained specialist teachers who know how to get the best from an online learning environment and who understand gifted learners and what interests them. The training of the teaching staff reflects how the intervention will take place during the process of teaching and learning, where it is essential that teachers are prepared to create a stimulating environment of potential and talents, as well as in performing work with the creativity of their students [14], that supports gifted children.

Gifted children quickly realize that the degree of boredom they endure seems vastly different from what peers in traditional school experience as they are told to slow down; wait, be patient while other kids catch up, and refrain from those questions that seem too advance or unrelated, and they find themselves standing still with no additional learning [15]. The NZCGE curriculum aims (Table 1) to help and develop different aspects in the gifted children and decrease boredom as strengths, talents, interests, and passions are developed while engaging in complex and abstract thinking as the program uses sophisticated learning processes. The learning strands (Table 1) developed for the classes contribute to eliminating boredom among gifted children by

expanding their knowledge and at the same time preparing them on how to research, attend to complex thinking, and most importantly how to communicate.

Gifted children are faced with social-emotional problems caused by the asynchronous emotional, cognitive and physical development, especially starting with the primary education period [16]. A trained teacher helps the gifted children in the class to communicate and interact socially by being a moderator. It helps the gifted children emotionally as well, as they could vocalize their knowledge and curiosity without hiding or pretending to not know things. Table 2, states that the MindPlus Online™ classes connect gifted children with like-minded peers, providing them with an online learning and social support network and a specialist teacher teaching, knows how to get the best from an online learning environment and understands gifted learners and what makes them engaged and interested.

IV. RESULTS

In measuring how engaged the gifted child is in the NZCGE class, a Likert questionnaire and open-ended questions were answered as in Table 3 and Table 4 by an observing parent. In the Likert questionnaire, it could be concluded that the child attending the NZCGE class becomes engaged as the answers are on the positive side. The course structure, learner interaction, student engagement, instructor presence, student satisfaction, and perceived learning was measured too, and it shows that the gifted child is engaged and satisfied with the NZCGE class as the course structure was good. The measurement was adapted from research done on 187 online students, where it was seen that the course structure, learner interaction, and instructor presence would all have a statistically significant impact on both perceived student learning and student satisfaction [17].

The observations that can be seen as the child follows the NZCGE classes are that the child is excited and interested to attend the classes (Table 3). The child lives in Malaysia, where there is a time difference from New Zealand, which is about 4–5 hours ahead, depending on the month. The classes are usually online at either 5 am or 6 am Malaysian time, the child will gladly wake up, prepare for the class, and attends it happily. He would gladly work on the activities or homework given and puts in a lot of effort as compared to some other classes as he enjoys what he does. The teacher makes the classes more engaged by giving out puzzles, sudoku, dingbats (Figure 1), riddles, crosswords, and other brain teasers at the beginning or middle of class.

TABLE 3 Survey questions on students' engagement in NZCGE MindPlus Online™ adapted from (Jasper, 2021).

No	Questions	Likert Value				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	How excited is your child being a part of this course?					X
2	How interested is your child in the subject of this course?					X
3	How does your child's interest in this course compare to other courses?					X
4	Outside of time spent in this class OR doing work for this class, how often does your child think about this class?				X	
5	How much effort does your child put into this course?					X
6	How does the amount of effort your child put into this course compare to the effort your child put into other courses?				X	
7	How much of a "routine" (such as a regular time/day to check what's due and then work on it) does your child find with this class?				X	
8	How difficult or easy is it for your child to try hard on the work for this class?					X
9	How difficult or easy is it for your child to stay focused on the work for this class?				X	
10	How difficult or easy is it for your child to know what work he/she has to do (and how to do it correctly) for this class?					X
11	How easily does your child follow/understand the lessons (notes) that the teacher presented?					X
12	How easily does your child follow/understand the activities that the teacher assigned during class time?					X

No	Questions	Likert Value				
		1	2	3	4	5
13	How easily does your child follow/understand the major research projects that the teacher assigned during class time?					X
14	How easy was it for your child to have questions answered by the teacher?					X
15	How do you feel about the amount of contact your child has with the teacher?				X	

*Likert key: 1 is not excited, less interested/difficult/not enough to 5 is excited/ interested/easy/ a lot

TABLE 4 Open-ended questions on students' engagement in NZCGE GO MindPlus Online™ adapted from (Jasper, 2021).

No	Open-Ended Question	
	Questions	Answers
1	In detail, what activities or aspects in this course have been the most engaging/interesting for your child?	<p>The most engaging/interesting part of the course for my child has been logical thinking. The teacher engages my child with different types of riddles or activities that require logical thinking, spreading it out in different classes. The teacher creatively interests my child in logical thinking by teaching a range of topics of not only science and maths but will include self-awareness and current issues. Discussions would be made about the topics that need logical thinking and homework related to it helps the understanding more and keeps the engagement and interest. Probability is taught in a fun and easy-to-understand way which is used for logical thinking where situations are uncertain. The uncertainty of the answer where deductive reasoning is needed builds interest and stimulates the mind of my gifted child.</p> <p>Example: Warm Up Logical Thinking As I was going to St Ives, I met a man with seven wives, Every wife had seven sacks, Every sack had seven cats, Every cat has seven kits, Kits, cats, sacks, and wives, How many were going to St Ives?</p>
2	In detail, what activities or aspects in this course have been the least engaging/interesting for your child?	<p>The least engaging/interesting part of the course for my child has been interpreting/describing pictures, photos or drawing. My child usually describes what he sees in a photo or picture or a drawing as what he sees without any interpretation and hidden meaning. Even though it is the least engaging activity for my child, eventually he learned to interpret situations and events happening around him, which has built a part of a good character conscience for his overall development.</p> <p>Example: Interpreting Drawing A drawing of a mural of a homeless girl begging for money, where vaguely behind her are well-developed buildings is shown. What my child can see is a girl that has no money and seems hungry. Only after discussions and guidance from the NZCGE teacher, did my child could understand that what we see around us, in photos, paintings or drawings could have meanings and interpretations. After being guided on how to look at the drawing from another angle, he saw that sometimes, even with a lot of development around us, there are still people that do not have proper living places and are constantly hungry or don't have money for a lot of daily necessities and we need to have a view on how the society can help in curbing this problem.</p>
3	If you had to describe this course to a friend who was thinking	The online learning meant for gifted children by NZCGE has a great curriculum that engages the child while stimulating the child to learn and venture more into other topics and

No	Open-Ended Question	
	Questions	Answers
	about enrolling their gifted child next year, what would you say to them?	disciplines. It helps with emotional well-being by providing a platform for gifted children to socialize and share ideas. It helps the gifted children to venture and learn new things not only from their teacher but also from their peers as each of them usually has a different interest that is unique. Even though it is online, it develops great communication not only between the students in class but also the teacher that is handling and teaching the class. Activities and homework that are given out are always fun and stimulating, creating an environment for the gifted child to flourish. It helps with self-confidence and as the emotional is supported, the cognitive of the gifted child is not compromised.

In Table 4, the open-ended questions that are answered by the observer share what engages or interests the gifted child in class and what does not. In the second question, where it was observed that the child encountered the least engaging activity as the child was not interested in it, by the end of the lesson, the uninterested gifted child learned how to eventually learn a new knowledge that was never an interest. Knowledgeable teacher with experience in handling gifted children is the main reason for attracting an uninterested gifted child to a topic they despise. Teaching experience and training are both critical in improving a teachers' knowledge about gifted students and how to teach and handle them [19].

TABLE 5 Student Learning and Satisfaction in Online Learning Environments Instrument (SLS-OLE) adapted from (Gray & Diloreto, 2016).

No	Items	Scale					
		S D	M D	S A	M A	M O A	S A
Course Structure/Organization							
1	Student learning outcomes were aligned to the learning activities.						X
2	Course navigation was illogical.	X					
3	The layout of the course was disorganized.	X					
4	Instructions about student participation were clearly presented.						X
5	The purpose of the course was clearly presented.						X
Learner Interaction							
1	Students frequently interacted with other students in the course.						X
2	There were no opportunities for active learning in this course.	X					
3	The learning activities promoted interaction with others.						X
4	Students had the opportunity to introduce themselves to others in the class.						X
5	Students communicated often with other students within the course.						X
6	Students regularly communicated with the instructor of the course.						X
7	Students received ongoing feedback from classmates.					X	

N	Items	Scale				
Student Engagement						
1	The student frequently interacted with the instructor of this course.					X
2	The student discussed what was learned in the course outside of class.				X	
3	The student completed readings as assigned during the course.					X
4	The student participated in synchronous and/or asynchronous chat sessions during the course.					X
5	The student was not actively engaged in the activities required in the course.					X
Instructor Presence						
1	The instructor's feedback on assignments was clearly stated.					X
2	The instructor's feedback on assignments was not constructive.	X				
3	The instructor provided timely feedback about students' progress in the course.					X
4	The instructor cared about student progress in this course.					X
5	The student learned from the feedback that was provided during the course.					X
Student Satisfaction						
1	The student is satisfied with the overall experience in this course.					X
2	The student would not recommend this course to other students.	X				
3	The student is satisfied with the level of student interaction that occurred in the course.					X
4	The student is satisfied with the learning in the course.					X
5	The student is satisfied with the instructor of the course.					X
6	The student is satisfied with the content of the course.					X
Perceived Learning						
1	The student is pleased with what was learned in the course.					X
2	The learning tasks enhanced students' understanding of the content.					X
3	The student learned less in the course than they	X				

N	Items	Scale
	anticipated.	
4	The student learned skills that helped in the future.	X
5	The learning activities promoted the achievement of student learning outcomes.	X
6	The course contributed to the student's professional development.	X

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Mostly Disagree (MD) 3 = Slightly Agree (SA), 4 = Moderately Agree (MA), 5 = Mostly Agree (MOA), 6 = Strongly Agree (SA)



Fig. 1 Example of dingbats question from NZCGE GO MindPlus™ class.

The learning strand provided by NZCGE is “Personal Development Research, Conceptual Development, and Talent Development” (Table 1), where to accomplish this, the gifted child will have to understand themselves and the challenges they face. At the beginning of the MindPlus Online™ program, the gifted child is briefed on what is ‘Gifted’, and the teacher shares stories of gifted people and the challenges they faced. The teacher encourages the gifted children to share and think about their challenges and how to overcome them and investigate other gifted person’s challenges and how to conquer them (Figure 2). Letting children know they’re gifted and discussing their intellectual capabilities with them will help them understand why they sometimes feel like outsiders, which is important as if pretending a child's giftedness [19] doesn’t exist, it won’t make those feelings go away, just as pretending a child's disability doesn’t exist won't make the disability go away [20].



Fig. 2 Exercise on knowing a gifted child’s challenges and how to overcome them from NZCGE MindPlus Online™ class.

The materials provided by the teacher are easily understandable and activities and exercises usually cover the learning strands of content and process strand (Table 1). One example is in Figure 3, in learning about photosynthesis. The tasks involve personal development research where complex thinking is needed. It helps with the development of talent and helps with conceptual thinking. The child performing the tasks is stimulated as the tasks need research to be done and it also involves other aspects. Prior to receiving the task, photosynthesis was explained by the teacher in a way that involves other topics, disciplines, and parts, where communication happens in the class as gifted children are inquisitive. The child will not just learn that photosynthesis needs sun and carbon dioxide to synthesize but also why is it important and it has them thinking about other aspects such as the environment and how it contributes to another discipline. What was observed was that the development of the learning strand is achieved by completing such tasks and it formed on how gifted child would look at a topic and try to research it.

TOOL	TASK
Language of the Discipline	Name at least 10 words associated with photosynthesis and find out what they mean. And... What other chemical reaction does the equation of photosynthesis remind you of? How do we cover this link week...
Details	* a NZ plant or tree and research it in detail. Make a scientific drawing of your tree or tree. Then make a detailed drawing of the parts of a leaf and label the diagram a leaf, print the image, and label the parts.
Tr.	How to teach younger children about photosynthesis – the process * variations of time of day affects photosynthesis, eg How * is winter affect photosynthesis? How might the time * season affect photosynthesis in the plants on the forest * its peak during the day and why? * forests affect economic prosperity over time? * relation and economic growth or decline in
Unanswered Questions	Have answered on this topic?
Ethics	* if the things human * management of our * events? If so, why and
Big Ideas	* the type of
Across the Disciplines	* and * could they
Changes over Time	* at 200 years, * as affected the * and how affecting the * in for the welfare of our

Fig. 3 Exercise on learning about photosynthesis in NZCGE MindPlus Online™ class.

V. ENHANCEMENTS

One enhancement that can be done towards the NZCGE program is to have more interactions between different classes among the gifted children to help them to develop their communication and social skills while interacting with new friends. Gifted children must have opportunities to be with intellectual peers, but cognitive similarities are not enough to ensure mutual liking, where effective social skills are necessary and may need to be directly taught, even to the brightest and most accomplished gifted child [21]. Interactions between different classes can be in the form of online challenges or games, where pairing students or creating different groups of students of different classes could flourish relations with others.

Foreign language classes would be a great addition for the gifted children, as in helping them by trying to provide intellectual challenges; not just work that is harder, but also with things to do that are intellectually stimulating in different ways, that aren't directly taught at school [22]. To further accomplish the learning, the students perhaps can virtually visit the country of the language of origin and learn about the country, the culture, the people, and others associated with it. It would be good if the NZCGE students could also have a chance to communicate with other gifted children from the country they are learning the foreign language.

Another enhancement would be for NZCGE to engage with different types of companies and bring the students on a virtual tour. An example would be a company that drills water wells. The virtual tour can show how to find water and what equipment is needed and who is involved. An academically gifted child and a creatively gifted child are built by imagination, emotional intensity, and curiosity [23].

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The combination of a good curriculum and well-trained teachers is a successful recipe for supporting and teaching gifted children. NZCGE is a great online platform that does support gifted children cognitively and emotionally. Even though it is online, the impact it has been seen on a gifted child is great and helps the child to have the self-confidence to enter back into society and blend in.

More gifted online classes with well-trained teachers should be offered, and the abundant commercial online

classes without properly trained teachers for gifted children should be highlighted, as gifted children have a high emotional intensity, where if the teacher does not understand them and does not know how to handle them, they might regress and the challenges of underachieving, boredom and social problems will arise. Gifted children need ample support from family and most importantly from the teachers that teach them, to develop their giftedness which can be used in the future for the betterment of the society and nation. With the engagement and interest of the gifted child in the MindPlus Online™ class, it helps to further support gifted children to diminish the challenges faced.

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