

Family and Community Session 2

Forming a Collaborative Student Support Network, Including School, Home and Community

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Foreword

The topics for these community forums were chosen with input from a variety of stakeholders in Project North Star. We understand that these topics are significant in parenting and educating gifted children in rural areas, but that they are just a handful of important topics families, educators, and communities need to discuss when nurturing the gifts and talents of young people. **These are a tiny lens on very large topics, and are intended to be a starting point for discussion and further exploration.** Please use these forum guides in whatever way makes sense in your community, and feel welcome to use them as a template for addressing other important topics.

The contents of these guides have been chosen using a number of criteria. We asked:

- Are they relevant to people who live in rural areas?
- Are they current and/or timeless?
- Are they respectful?
- Are they universal? (Some resources reference specific cultures, regions, or traditions. We know the readings cannot be specific to every group, but do the selected resources spark important questions that are relevant to our target audience—communities, educators, and families in rural areas who are actively engaged in creating opportunities for growth for gifted and talented children?)
- Are they thought provoking?
- Can we show alternate points of view with multiple readings, in order to help start a positive dialogue?
- Are they readily available in complete form? (Most sources are available online. We felt the need to include excerpts from several books whose authors' wisdom we felt necessary to include in our work. All sources are cited.)

We understand that not all readings will ring true to all people. Please read with an open mind, and the understanding that multiple points of view are helpful, even if the specific information offered does not apply to your situation. Analyze the readings with an eye for finding similarities, differences, and commonalities of purpose to your own experience. Feel welcome to disagree respectfully, or to champion another point of view with equal respect.

The content of these sessions are not intended to reflect the opinions or beliefs of the Project North Star staff, contractors, consultants, or participants. In fact, resources were chosen with an eye to presenting multiple points of view, with the intent of providing a lot of scope for conversation.

Above all, the Project North Star Team applauds you for engaging in discussions that bridge the divide often found between education, family, and community. We know that this collaborative spirit is very often a strength of rural communities, and is something we seek to share with others. We sincerely thank you for your contributions to this work.

Family and Community Meeting Checklist

- 3 weeks or more ahead of time
 - Schedule speaker/facilitator
 - Ask about tech needs
 - Ask about hand-outs
 - Reserve space
 - Make childcare arrangements (if applicable)
 - Create flyer, including
 - Date
 - Time
 - Venue
 - Topic/speaker
 - Childcare availability
 - Cost (optional for event with paid speaker)
 - Benefits of attending (building community, engaging topic, refreshments, etc.)
 - Target audience
 - List event on school website
 - Advertise event using community channels
 - Newspapers and newsletters
 - Radio
 - Bulletin boards
- 2 weeks ahead of time
 - Notify email list
 - Send flyers home from school
 - Post flyers in public spaces
- 1 week ahead of time
 - Print hand-outs
 - Confirm space

- Create any necessary signage for venue
- Second reminder to email list
- Create and print meeting agenda and/or introduction notes
- Two days ahead of time
 - Remind speaker/facilitator
 - Remind childcare provider
 - Third reminder to email list
- Day of
 - Refreshments
 - Arrive early to set up chairs, signs, and test equipment
 - Take notes and create an action item list
- Follow up
 - Post and/or email notes from the meeting
 - Thank speaker/facilitator
 - Accomplish action items
- Sample flyer format, can be half or third sheet

Your School or District is hosting a facilitated discussion on Creating a Collaborative Team to Nurture and Grow our Children's Talent

Date:

Topic:

Location:

Cost (include the word free if no cost)

Open to public, invite a friend, or specific audience (optional)

Childcare (if applicable)

RSVP: Your contact info, end date to RSVP

Purpose, e.g., *As we work to build community and collaboration between school and home, we are offering a series of facilitated discussions on topics of interest to families and educators of high-potential students. This discussion will focus on building a supportive network for students, including home, school, and community. Please join the discussion to learn more!*

Suggested Reading #1

To Be Gifted and Māori...

By Rose Blackett

As a minority culture in New Zealand, the Māori perspectives of giftedness have a lot to offer the majority culture ... if only we would **listen**. It is all too easy for a majority culture within a nation to judge a minority culture harshly. The majority culture holds the power and therefore often acts like “big brother” ... without valuing “little brother.” By sitting in “judgement” we fail to listen and miss some valuable lessons.

Dr Jill Bevan-Brown, an academic from New Zealand, who is of Māori heritage (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Wehiwehi, Ngāi te Rangi and Ngāti Awa ki Waikanae) has researched and written on the Māori perspectives of giftedness. Her work offers a unique viewpoint and relevant ideas for educators working with gifted students from other minority groups around the globe.

Bevan-Brown (2011) emphasizes that Māori, like any ethnic group, are a diverse people. A single all-inclusive “Māori” concept of giftedness does not exist; rather, we find a set of components based on traditional and contemporary concepts of giftedness/special abilities. Within Māoridom, it is necessary to look at what has come previously (the past), before we can gain a true understanding of the present.

These are the eight distinctive components identified by Bevan-Brown (2011):

1. Giftedness is widely distributed in Māori society. It is not bound by social class, economic status, lineage or gender.
2. Giftedness can be exhibited in both individual and group contexts. Also, an individual’s gifts and talents can be “owned” by a group.
3. The areas of giftedness and talent recognised are broad and wide ranging.
4. Importance is placed on both “qualities” and “abilities.”
5. The concept of giftedness is holistic in nature and inextricably intertwined with the other Māori concepts.
6. There is an inherent expectation that a person’s gifts and talents will be used to benefit others.
7. The Māori culture provides a firm foundation on which giftedness is grounded, nurtured, exhibited and developed.
8. Mana tangata (power and status accrued through one’s leadership talents, human rights, mana of people) is frequently accorded to gifted and talented people, especially in the areas of traditional knowledge and service to others.

Within the New Zealand education system, as with other education systems around the globe, students from minority groups are underrepresented in our gifted programs. This makes one reflect on whether the programming options we are offering as a majority culture meet the needs of the minority cultures.

Bevan-Brown (2011) offers a number of suggestions for improving the situation for gifted Māori students:

1. Educators should consult with Māori and work in partnership with them to identify and develop the potential of gifted and talented Māori learners.
2. Strong early childhood centre/school – whānau (family) networks should be developed and utilised to support and encourage gifted Māori learners.
3. Methods and programs used to identify and provide for gifted and talented Māori learners must be culturally appropriate, challenging and delivered in a culturally responsive environment.
4. Teachers, parents and whānau (family) should work together to raise aspirations and self-esteem of all Māori children
5. Gifted Māori learners should be encouraged and developed in their Māoritanga (Māori culture, practices, and beliefs).
6. Teachers and other professionals who work with Māori learners need to be better trained to provide appropriately for Māori learners in general and gifted Māori learners in particular.

In recent correspondence, Bevan-Brown shared a quote with me that “*Commandment number one of a truly civilised society is this: let people be different*” - David Grayson, b. 1870 (Journalist). She acknowledged the wisdom within these words and added “*Commandment number two is to value and learn from that difference!*”

Nāu rourou, nāku rourou ka ora ai te iwi – With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive. If **all** cultures are to share an inclusive meal around the table of Gifted Education, then big brother may need to share what is in his food basket and taste what is in little brother’s basket ... even if he does not like the look of it! After all, little brother may not have much in his food basket, but what he offers is “quality” not “quantity.” We will not know until we sit together as equals at this table.

My challenge to you as educators is to reflect on whether you are offering a gifted program that is truly open to diversity and accepting of differences, or are you offering an exclusive gifted program that suits the majority culture?

Reference

Bevan-Brown, J. (2011). Gifted and talented Māori learners. In R. Moltzen (ed), *Gifted and talented New Zealand perspectives* (3rd ed.) (pp. 82-110). New Zealand: Pearson.

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Suggested Reading #2

Starting and Sustaining a Parent Group to Support Gifted Children, an NAGC ebook

<http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Parent%20CK/Starting%20and%20Sustaining%20a%20Parent%20Group.pdf>

- Section 1, Why Start a Parent Group?, Pages 8 to 10
- Section 2, Getting Organized, pages 11 to 17
- Appendix B, page 35

Discussion Rules

1. You cannot change other people. We can share ideas, resources, and opinions, but we can't make other people think the way we do. This community forum is all about finding common ground.
2. Compromise. Talk about the goals underlying your ideas and plans. When you see why people want to do things, you often find you are working toward the same goals in different ways. Meet somewhere in the middle.
3. Practice acceptance. When we accept others' differences, we give them a gift. This is great role modeling for our children.
4. Realize your contribution. Just by being here and participating in this discussion, you are making a difference in the lives of your children and the future of your community. Well done!

Project North Star ~ Discussion Notes ~ Collaborative Teamwork Strategies

<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Planning</i>
<p>What Do You Need?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of all cultures represented in your community • Generational knowledge (history) and observation of trends • Specialized knowledge and skills 	<p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences are valuable and provide opportunities for learning • Sharing accumulated knowledge about what has or has not worked in the past • Embrace community resources
<p>Community Stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators • Families • Children • Community leaders • Business owners • Public servants • Potential partners nationwide 	<p>What is needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People • Money • Venues • Things • Information • Support from experts • Mentors and role models
<p>Forming a Collaborative Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine ownership • Collect stakeholders • Brainstorm as a team • Set a schedule • Determine and assign tasks • Find a venue or venues • Publicize • Create goals • Strategic plan • Outreach • Sustainability 	<p>What can be done?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund raisers • Academic clubs • In-school enrichment programs • After school programs • Saturday programs • Summer programs • Community events • Outreach programs • Recognition programs • Resources hotline • Mentorship or internship program

Discussion Questions for Reading #1

1. Thinking about the article by Blackett, what ‘baskets’ can you identify in your community? What does each contribute to the benefit of all? Some examples: cultures and traditions, generations of community members, specialized knowledge and skills, etc.
2. What do you perceive as being the biggest obstacles to collaboration in your community?
3. Thinking of the person who made the biggest positive difference in your life, what can you pay forward to this generation? What role will you take in this collaborative team?
4. Family is the first teacher in a child’s life. How can families help children make the transition to school? How can schools help families?
5. Sometimes, families and educators have different views about how to best help a child realize his or her potential. Often, the child has yet another idea in mind. How do you reconcile different views, values, and goals between child, home and school?
6. How can you, and this group, find common ground in how your community views academic success?
7. How might your children make a difference in your community as adults? What might they have in their baskets?

Discussion Questions for Reading #2

8. Thinking about the NAGC ebook, Section 1, “Why Start a Parent Group?”, do the reasons for starting a parent group seem the same reasons for starting a Collaborative Talent Nurture Team in your community?
9. How will your group be different from a parent-only group, as mentioned in the ebook? How will it be the same?

Discussion Questions that Synthesize Readings #1 and #2

10. Why is it important to include other stakeholders in the community? Think about Blackett’s article.
11. Who in your community will benefit from nurturing your youth’s talent? Create a list. These are your stakeholders.
12. What resources can your community provide? (See Discussion Notes and Practical Strategies for a beginning list—break it down into people, money, space, and things.)
13. Create a comprehensive list of barriers to participation in your collaborative team, school/family activities, and community events. Think about things like language(s) spoken, transportation, work hours, and childcare for younger siblings.
14. How can you make any activities you plan more inclusive for all stakeholders?

Practical Strategies

Asking for support from your community:

You've determined what your community can offer. Before you ask for it, take some time to come up with the who, why, where, when and how, and the ways in which the community will benefit, in addition to the what. For example:

What: empty packaging containers

Where: grocery store

Who: 6th graders

When: as available

Why: to explore math, engineering, physics, and art through building and testing structures

Community benefit: An after-school or weekend event during which the students can display their creations, teach others some basic engineering and physics principles, and play games based on these principles, e.g. Angry Birds. Materials will be recycled when the event is over. The store gets good publicity. Students learn, and the community participates.

Asking for support from outside of your community:

You may not have a store or business that can supply the items you require for a project or event. Feel free to ask further afield. The worst they can say is no. For example:

What: outdated design samples (countertop chips, tiles, carpet samples, unsold mixed paint, etc.)

Where: home improvement store

Who: school art department

When: once yearly

Why: for numerous art projects, dioramas, math manipulatives, murals, community art installations, etc.

Community benefit: Enhanced art program, supplies used in design and home-building, skill-building, beautification. Responsible recycling of unused materials (paint) can be taught. The donation is a tax write-off for the store. Be sure to follow any guidelines they have posted on their website for making requests, or call customer service to ask how to make a request.

Sample letter:

Dear Community Member,

On behalf of my District or School, I am seeking contributions from our community to help our students learn about math, engineering and physics through art. We hope to share our learning and work with the community during an event on this day. We would be pleased to name you as one of the sponsors of this educational outreach event. Would you be willing to contribute these materials, and or funds to provide advertising and refreshments for our event?

Thank you very much,

Collaborative Team Member

Follow-up and Extension on Readings and Discussion

The following excerpts, links, and research questions are included to begin to broaden and deepen your exploration of the topic. These, again, are suggestions, not required reading and research. This section is included for those whose interest was sparked, and who seek more information. This is not a comprehensive list of resources by any means. As you explore these suggestions, you will find many, many more. Follow your interest, build on previous knowledge, and share with your community!

Shared Wisdom

Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families (excerpt)

by Cori Brewster and Jennifer Railsback

Next steps: Strategies for engaging all families

As the level of trust in a school increases, teachers, family members, and administrators not only become more willing to work together, but develop higher expectations for success. There is still much that can be done, however, to make opportunities for involvement more meaningful and more accessible to all. Listed below are a number of strategies suggested by practitioners, researchers, and parents for engaging families with diverse backgrounds, interests, and needs:

- **Collaborate with Families on Ways to Be Involved**

In many schools, staff members have traditionally been responsible for establishing:

the nature of the relationship between themselves and parents. If parents feel uncomfortable with the school's conceptualization of family involvement, they may be inclined to abstain from any of the 'menu items' made available by school personnel (Voltz, 1994, p. 290).

Communicating with families and asking them how they would like to be involved and how the school can facilitate that is an essential part of developing true family-school collaborations.

- **Provide family members with opportunities to develop participation skills**

"If ethnically diverse parents feel they lack the knowledge and competence to operate within the bureaucratic structure of the school, they may involve themselves at lower levels or not at all" (Young, 1998, p. 16). Programs such as the Parent Effectiveness Leadership Training (discussed in the Northwest Sampler) can be helpful for families to understand their rights, responsibilities, and roles in the education system, and develop their leadership and communication skills.

- **Express high expectations for family-school partnerships**

"Teacher expectations can affect teacher-family interactions in the same way that teacher expectations can affect student-teacher interactions" (Voltz, 1994, p. 289). It is up to schools to make genuine efforts to reach out to families and assure them their contributions are valued.

- **Communicate with families in person**

In some cultures, notes sent home from the school are regarded as too impersonal and may not be interpreted as genuine invitations for parents to participate. Visiting families in their home at times that are convenient for them may be a better way to reach out.

- **Recognize diverse family structures**

"School personnel often regard mothers as the primary caregivers in the family, and therefore direct most communications about a child's school performance to his or her mother. Under these circumstances, paternal involvement may not be encouraged, and fathers may even receive messages implying that it is not welcomed" (Onikama, Hammond, & Koki, 1998, p. 6). Don't overlook other adults in students' lives — grandparents, older siblings, tribal leaders, and so on — who play a central role in their upbringing (Voltz, 1994).

- **Create a family resource center in the school**

Family resource centers: should be centrally located in the school, conveying the message that families are valued partners in education. Ideally, centers should be equipped with kitchens and bathrooms, soft furniture, resource information in many languages, telephone and computer access, and toys for small children. When the center welcomes the whole family — including children of all ages — parents or grandparents can access the resources available to them more easily. Even more important, making the whole family welcome displays the school's respect for the family as a unit (Trumbull et al., 2001, pp. 43).

- **Make school events more accessible to families**

Providing transportation and childcare may make participation in school events possible for a number of family members who were not previously able to attend. Holding events in other places in the community that parents frequent and where they feel more comfortable is another way to encourage participation (Sosa, 1997). It may also be necessary to offer events at different times of the day or week to reach all families.

- **Don't let language be a barrier**

As Antunez (2000) writes, "Inability to understand the language of the school is a major deterrent to the parents who have not achieved full English proficiency. In these cases, interactions with the schools are difficult, and, therefore, practically nonexistent." There is much that schools can do to prevent language from blocking families' involvement with the school, from hiring bilingual staff members to connecting parents with others in the community, as discussed below. Whenever possible, schools should avoid asking children to translate for their parents, as this may do more to make parents uncomfortable than to aid in communication.

- **Build connections between families who speak the same language**

Connecting recent immigrants to other members of the school community who speak their language and are more familiar with the school may be especially valuable, particularly for families with few other connections in the area. Families may also feel more comfortable attending school events if they know that other people they recognize and can communicate with easily will be there.

- **Provide opportunities for meaningful involvement**

Studies have shown that family members are generally more interested in activities that are directly connected to their child. Volunteering at a school fundraiser, for example, may be seen as less valuable to some families than receiving information on how to work with their child at home on reading or math. Further, families need to know what purpose activities serve and how they relate to overall goals.

- **Design assignments that build on families' "funds of knowledge"**

Families offer a wealth of knowledge that can contribute to the curriculum. One teacher, for example, identified construction work as a topic with which many of her students' families had experience. She then developed a series of assignments in which students researched and wrote about construction work, built model buildings, and gave oral reports on their projects. "By the end of the semester, 20 parents and community people had visited [the] class and shared their knowledge with her students" (NCREL, 1994). Other schools, such as Heritage Elementary in Oregon, have developed projects in which children interview their families about their culture in the classroom, and the families teach the students dances and songs. (see the Northwest Sampler for more about this project).

- **Provide staff training on working with families**

As noted earlier in the booklet, many teachers have had little experience or training on ways to engage students' families. Others may feel intimidated by parents or worry that involving parents more directly in the classroom will be a waste of time. School leaders may need to jumpstart a school-wide family involvement initiative by providing professional development on school-family collaboration, intercultural communication, connections between culture and learning, or other topics specific to involving diverse families more directly in students' education (Trumbull et al., 2001).

- **Consider ways to involve and build relationships with family members of high school students**

"As students move to secondary schools, parents and students are faced with the challenge of communicating and building relationships with several teachers" (Adams & Christenson, 2000, pp. 491–492). Teachers who have more than 100 students find it increasingly challenging to build relationships with all their students' families. Under these circumstances, a school can develop relationships in such ways as inviting families to participate in activities such as student mentoring, career days, senior projects, and fundraisers. Sending short but frequent notes by e-mail to families also helps to keep the school in touch with families on a regular basis.

Further Investigation

See the rest of the article from Shared Wisdom, "Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families" by visiting: <http://www.adlit.org/article/21522/#strategies>