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‘THE CLUSTER TEAM’

A Model of Collaboration and Collegiality in
New Zealand Gifted and Talented Education

2003-2008

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the evolution of a cluster concept involving primary schools that collaborated in a rural region of New Zealand to solve the problem of disadvantage for gifted and talented children. The principals formed a management committee to direct the implementation of a programme to ensure geographic isolation did not mean high ability children missed out on learning opportunities for the fulfilment of personal potential. As a collective provision, the cluster was an inaugural Talent Development Initiative and resourced by the Ministry of Education for six years from 2003–2008. One landmark feature was the partnership with an independent, rural education provider responsible for the facilitation and co-ordination. The literature revealed no evidence of similar provisions, so this paucity of research indicated the cluster management model was unique in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

The purpose of this case study was to gain an insight from the perceptions of the principals into the ways the cluster was managed; the effectiveness of the provision; and the central ethos. The methodology was based on a phenomenological approach. Data was generated through a focus group because this forum paralleled the decision-making mode of leadership. The key finding for this investigation was that the cluster was an applicable and effective mechanism to provide for gifted and talented students in New Zealand. This success as a TDI was premised on the core principles for the creed of the cluster. Passion and commitment were essential. Professional development was critical to grow a teacher knowledge base and improve outcomes for students. Good funding was crucial to enhance talent and enable sustainability. It was important to develop a special concept of giftedness befitting the values of the cluster community and reflecting a child-centred approach integral to the shared philosophy. A significant component was the external facilitation to co-ordinate the programme and to weld the group into a cluster team. The ethos at the centre was the extraordinary spirit of collegiality and camaraderie binding the cluster together. These findings from this study confirm the cluster as a model of best practice in the field of New Zealand gifted and talented education.

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DEDICATION

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