

**“Cos we’re all looking at it from
a different point of view”
Understandings about achievement
and underachievement for gifted and
talented students.**

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Presentation Outline

- **Aims of this study**
- **Data collection process**
- **Brief summary of Findings**
- **What did the **students** say about **underachievement**?**
- **Similarities and differences**
- **One suggestion from the literature and the study for preventing and remediating underachievement**

Research Questions

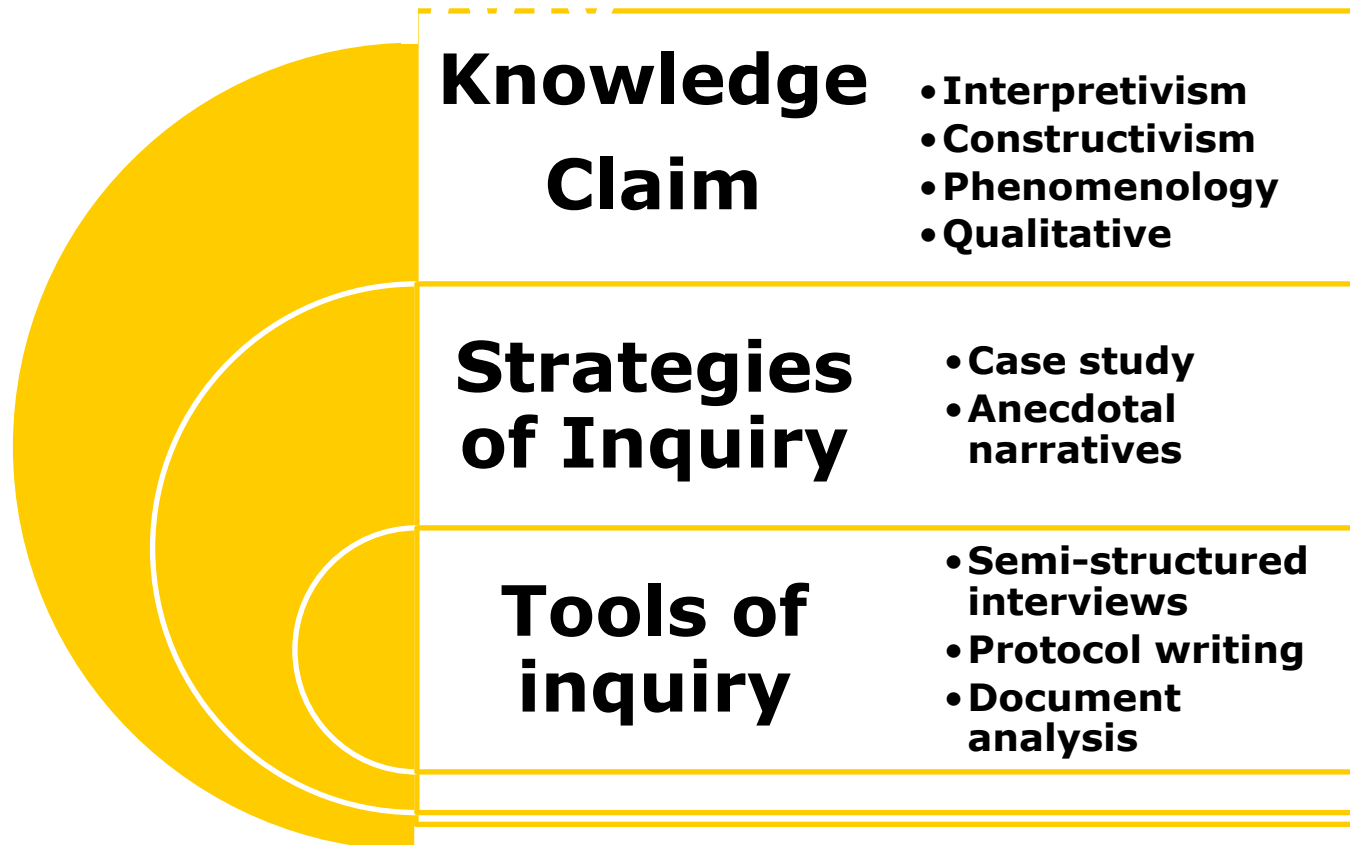
What are the understandings that gifted and talented students, their parents and their teachers have about the achievement and underachievement of gifted learners in New Zealand schools?

- **What factors influence these understandings?**
- **How are the understandings of students, parents and teachers similar or different?**
- **What are the implications for educators, for parents and for student outcomes?**

Are understandings different?

Cos we're all looking at it from a different point of view. It's the same as if you and I both saw an accident now and went away separately and wrote down what we saw. We'd both see it differently. But you've got a teenager looking at the same thing as what their parents are looking at, as is the teacher. Well the teacher's always gonna presume they're right. Um, the parent's always gonna be a wee bit biased and presume their child's always right and they're gonna want the best for their child and you've got a teenage opinion. And school *sucks* when you're a teenager, it's a drag. So, no, I think you'd get three different opinions completely.





Year 8:

2 classes at 1
intermediate

Year 9, 10:

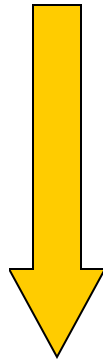
5 high schools



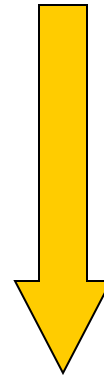
Interviews x 3

Reflection
sheets

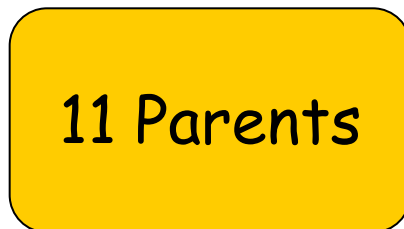
School reports



76 individual
interviews
3 focus group
interviews



Initial
letter at
Year 8



Interviews
x 2

Interviews
x 3

School
policies

Super-ordinate Themes



What do the students say about underachievement?

- **Its about not working to your ability**
- **Its about your own expectations**
- **Its about a lack of effort**
- **Its about low interest and the prioritising of a social life**

“Um well, ‘Achieveds’ aren’t particularly, you know, they’re not particularly hard to get or anything so it is quite a low mark so it probably would be

Not working to your ability

Less than what one is capable of BUT not necessarily failing:

Underachieved in that I haven’t done as well as I could have done. Like I haven’t necessarily failed something, but I just haven’t done as well as I could have done. (Autumn Ashes)

Pass is not good enough for able students:

Um, well, “Achieveds” aren’t particularly, you know, they’re not particularly hard to get or anything so it is quite a low mark so it probably would be underachievement, yes. (Marty)

Potential is interchangeable with ability



- **Able students have potential and underachievement is not fulfilling this potential:**

**Ah, someone who basically decides to put the bar somewhere which is maybe stupidly low for them and where they should have the bar, maybe if it's only half or quarter of that and then if they only just reach that or don't reach it and it's basically about not committing themselves to trying to get to where they can and their potential levels.
(Kurt)**

About your own expectations

- **It is the student who is the arbitrator of what underachievement is about – not the teacher or parent.**
- **Failure to reach own expectations**
- **“I don’t care what others think”**

Underachievement in my view

I just got in the Merit mark and I usually get high Merit or Excellence, so I thought you know I could have done better. So I thought myself I had underachieved my ability.

Would the teacher say you'd underachieved?

No, cos within the class the Merit is – it goes Not Achieved, Achieved, Merit, Excellence, so that's a high pass, but for myself I would see it as an underachievement. (Rambo)

Lack of effort

- **Relationship between a lack of effort and a low performance – you don't put in the effort you will underachieve.**
- **Overlap with not working to your ability**

I think it's maybe like if you know how much you can do and you just like can't be bothered, and you're just like, 'Oh, it'll be fine if I just go this far' when you really could have gone further. And lazy, only doing like enough to get you passed and not much more. (Astrid)

Lack of effort

- **Frustration with highly able peers who don't bother to try**

OR

- **Who achieve to an acceptable level with no effort**

Its really annoying to see people who you know are smart just not even trying because it kind of defeats the purpose of going to school. Like if you're gonna go to school, you might as well try. (Bruce Wayne)

Low interest and prioritising of a social life

- **Underachievement is about low interest in school related activities**

which

- **Correlates with a belief that negotiating a successful social life is most important**

Low interest if no relevance

- **Belief that learning should have relevance; tasks that did not have a purpose led to low motivation to achieve**
- **Able students want learning to prepare them for the future**

...rather than learning something that we'll probably never use in our lives and we don't even know why we're learning. (Oliver Stone)

If it isn't about the exam, its not relevant

- **BUT – learning for exams is relevant because achieving well in exams helps prepare for the future.**

Well, this year it kinda doesn't matter as much to me as like next year, obviously, with NCEA and stuff. So I will admit I've been kind of lazy this year. (Autumn Ashes)

What is important for able adolescents?

- **Underachievement could be about low interest in doing well at school because things outside of academic learning are more important**

Cos yeah, my social life is probably the most important part of my life. (Hubert Cumberland)

Underachievement and prioritising a social life

- **Tension between working towards a successful adolescent social life and performing highly at school**

But maybe, maybe your social life means more to you. You know, so you've sort of gotta think about what you want. You know, if you don't really care about getting bad grades or whatever, you're working on like making friends and going to parties and things, that's fine, keep going on with your parties ...so you've just gotta think about what matters most to you and what's the most important at that stage of life. (Bruce Wayne)

Underachievement and prioritising a social life

But you guys like have a positive social life. Like some people have a really negative social life. They might have a really negative group of friends and that's sometimes why they would underachieve because like they wanna be with their group of friends and feel stable and like it's not always the reason but sometimes it is. And I can think of examples of where that's happened a bit. (Bruce Wayne)

What do the students say about underachievement?

- **Its about not working to your ability**
- **Its about your own expectations**
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What do the parents say about underachievement?

- **Its about not working to your ability**
- **Its about an acceptance of mediocrity from the students**
- **Its about a lack of interest**

What do the teachers say about underachievement?

- **Its about not working to your ability**
- **Its about low interest**
- **Its about a lack of effort**
- **Its about a lack of skills**

High achievers versus low achievers - motivational beliefs

- **High academic achievers had realistic aspirations**
- **Low academic achievers had confusing or unrealistic aspirations**
- **Adolescent high achievers showed early determination of career direction**
- **Adolescent low achievers did not**

(Reis, 2007)

(Peterson, 2000)

Realistic and relevant goal setting for gifted underachievers

- **Past interventions have included the setting of goals only indirectly, within context of other programmes**
- **Focus has been on academic goals as perceived problem lies in academic performance**
- **Suggest encouraging underachieving gifted students to set and work towards personally motivating and intrinsically appealing goals**

(Morisano and Shore,2010)

Is it a good idea? What do the students say?

- **Goals need to be personally meaningful for the students. Goals that adults value may have little meaning for students.**

I never liked it at primary school. We had to sit down with a piece of paper and write , “this is my goal for English and Maths.” Because it doesn’t help, I don’t think, and ah, I mean it’s fine to set goals for yourself and say, I want to be able to do this by the end of the year, but having to sit down with a piece of paper and write for the teacher, you know, “Oh I want to be able to do this, this and this” – it’s a pain and I don’t think it really helps. (Marty)

Does the goal have attainment value?

I agree with Marty. I hated the primary school thing, but goals, not written down ones, just knowing where you're heading, are probably a good idea. Like being able to see, just being able to see where you're going and what you're going to achieve at the end and stuff is – like they don't necessarily have to be written down and that, just kind of saying to yourself you know well I'm gonna do well in this or 'I'm gonna be able to do this by...' (Autumn Ashes)

- **Attainment value – personalise by integrating academic goals into student's own ideals**

(Siegle & McCoach, 2000)

Is the goal realistic and achievable?

- **Positive expectation that can achieve any goal that is set. Specific and attainable.**
- **Goals that are too high, too low or too vague inhibit motivation.**

The whole ‘aim for the stars, get the sky’ – ah, in my opinion that’s basically saying that the goal is at the max and you’ll get reasonably high ...but never be able to reach that top mark. I find it is almost unreasonable to try and put that on yourself, to be able to reach something that you can’t and is impossible really. (Kurt)

Realistic and achievable

Like when I was little I wanted to be, you know, I wanted to be Jenny *Shitley* as I said. You know I wanted to be the Prime Minister and I would hate to be that now... So the ones that seem more realistic, but they're not too realistic, they're not easy to get but they're just above what you can do, they're just above what you can reach, they're the ones that you always strive for and they're the ones you're most likely to reach. (Hubert Cumberland)

Does the goal have utility value?

- **For gifted students goals should have utility value = how does the goal relate to future aspirations? Helps if gifted underachievers can see beyond immediate school tasks to long term benefits. (Siegle & McCoach, 2000)**

You know, setting goals is quite a mature thing to do, because you're thinking about your future... and you're thinking about where you want to be in the world and you're thinking about where you are now and where you could be. So you're actually really trying and you want to achieve. (Hubert Cumberdale)

Final words – to goal set or not to goal set?

You need to be knowing where you're going and um – not exactly step by step, but there's always like a train, there's always stations that you go to. (Oliver Stone)

Yeah, I think it's good so then you're not just aimlessly going through school, not knowing – like if you think, Ok, I'm gonna work towards something, then you kind of know where you want to go. (Rambo)

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