

I Dreamed a Dream



From a presentation at the 2019 Conference Growing Gifted: *Nurture. Flourish. Soar.* organised by the Tasmanian Association for the Gifted.

One person's view of gifted education in an ideal world.

Drawing on nearly 2 decades of learning, advocating, advising and lobbying, the author reflects on the practices, attitudes and values that could make a huge difference to the education of Tasmania's gifted students.

While presented as "a dream", much of this content could be easily achieved in Tasmania with a coordinated approach to the education of our gifted students.

About the Author:

Lynne [REDACTED] has been actively involved in the Tasmanian Association for the Gifted (TAG) for 19 years, including 9 years as President. She is Tasmanian Director and Treasurer for the National Gifted Association, AAEGT. A qualified and experienced teacher with experience teaching, training and facilitating learning with all ages, Lynne's knowledge of gifted education expanded as she advocated for her gifted son. She has conducted local information sessions for educators and parents, professional development for teachers, and presentations at state, national and world conferences.

Introduction

As I started to think about this topic, the question of “where to start?” became increasingly more difficult, because it is not just a question of appropriate legislation, policies, systemic approaches, evidence based structures, educators and leaders skilled at gifted education and providing great opportunities for gifted students, but a plethora of values, attitudes, societal beliefs and behaviours, along with subconscious and subliminal thoughts that impact on the whole process of recognising, accepting, providing for, nurturing and allowing gifted children to grow and achieve their potential.

While my dream is just that – my dream for Tasmania – it is informed by the work of many well recognised in the field of gifted education and by evidence-based systems and processes adopted elsewhere. These include, but are not limited to:-

- The Senate inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Children (2001);
- Dr François Gagné’s Differentiated model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) which underpins the Gifted policies of many Australian states;
- Dr François Gagné’s 10 commandments; a lovely list of what ought to happen for gifted students, with a summary of what this might mean for education;
- Professor Karen Rodgers, who changed my life - and the course of education for my son. It is her I have to thank for the knowledge and confidence to advocate for the major appropriate intervention in his education - a radical acceleration in high school from 1st term grade 7 to second term grade 9;
- Professor Miraca Gross, with her fabulous work on profoundly gifted students and her longitudinal studies, as well as her in depth insights into other aspects of the education of gifted students;
- Systems for catering *effectively* for gifted students in other states and countries including (but not limited to):-
 - The selective schools and partially selective schools in other Australian States;
 - The Accelerated Learning Program at Kedron State High School (Queensland);
 - The SEAL Academy programme in Victoria, which provides accelerated learning by telescoping grades 7-10 into a 3-year programme.
 - The work of the Acceleration Institute at the Belin Blank Centre, in particular their publications *A Nation Deceived* and *A Nation Empowered*

This is not an academic, well-referenced document, my sources are drawn from almost 2 decades of reading, attending workshops and conferences and a little specific research from time to time. I will make some references; some partial references and some statements that are not referenced at all but are all based on learning somewhere along my own journey in giftedness.

Tasmania still has a long way to go

My work with TAG has included more than a decade of conversations with parents of gifted students who are

“While we have some dedicated and committed teachers who are skilled at working with gifted students, it is my belief that there is no school in any of our education systems, that is systemically identifying and catering effectively for all gifted students in their care”

frustrated with the school that their children attend. While my own conversations about how schools might provide for my child are now more than a decade old, I still hear from other parents that their experiences mirror those I have had. These include:-

- An individual teacher who might identify and provide for a gifted child one year, but the teacher the following year simply does not understand the nature of giftedness nor how to cater for a gifted child;
- The teacher has a belief that a child *must* complete the mundane work for the rest of the class before being allowed to work on *more* or (hopefully) *different* work;
- I hear from parents whose children are holding it together behaviourally, socially and emotionally at school but are experiencing meltdowns at home and lashing out or behaving in very difficult ways;
- Children who are demonstrating a high level of understanding, conceptualising, reading, learning, etc at home but are refusing to demonstrate this at school, instead they are dumbing down to fit in with their classmates.

The Components of My Dream

- Education
- Effective systems and structures
- Values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours
- Relationships
- Listening to our gifted students

Education

The place of education in my dream is not only about the education of our gifted students, but also about:-

- **Educating our leaders, political and educational**

We do not necessarily need our political leaders to be fully informed about all aspects of gifted education but we do need them to know that they need staff and advisers who are very knowledgeable in the area and can give our leaders appropriate guidance.

Educational leaders at all levels need to be better informed about giftedness but also prepared to consult those with real expertise in gifted education when developing policies and making decisions that will impact on gifted students.

School based leaders should be required to have a level of professional learning or demonstrated expertise in gifted education to be appointed to their positions. They should also be required to appoint and consult a gifted education specialist

“It doesn’t make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do”

Steve Jobs

within the school, a specialist who has the authority to advise all staff, including the principal.

Our leaders, basically, need to be secure and confident enough in their leadership to accept and act on expert advice. Good leaders surround themselves with people smarter than themselves.

- **Educating the leaders and staff of our university schools of education**

We really need people at this level to be sufficiently informed in *all* the areas they are teaching, at a much higher level than they are actually teaching, or for which they are responsible, and to understand that many gifted students have needs that cannot be easily addressed in a framework that is “inclusive”. We need these people to understand that differentiation, even with an in-depth understanding of what differentiation for gifted students looks like, is not a one-size-fits-all solution. We need them to understand that there are decades of research that show that well planned and well executed, adequate acceleration can be an excellent educational intervention.

It is not good enough to have people at this level make a range of excuses for not specifically teaching about the needs of gifted students.

- **Educating our teachers and early childhood educators**

While The Senate inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Children (2001) specifically named organisations and programmes that may no longer exist, the core context of the recommendations remains sound and currently valid. Recommendation 14 specified:-

“newly graduated teachers have at least a semester unit on the special needs of gifted children in their degrees.”

And the inquiry, in recommendation 15 identified that there should be:-

“professional development on issues to do with giftedness as a priority”

University teaching and professional learning needs to be delivered by those with qualifications and a very high level of expertise in the field of gifted education.

Every teacher or early childhood educator has, on average, 2-3 gifted students in their class, so every teacher needs both pre-service education in gifted education and ongoing professional learning in gifted education.

- **Educating our school psychologists**

It is not good enough that we have school psychologists who claim never to have encountered a gifted child, or who state they do not believe in acceleration.

We need our school psychologists to be educated to identify gifted students; to understand the range and combinations of complex factors that giftedness implies and to be able to respond appropriately; to administer tests sensitively; and to recommend provisions across the full range of options as is relevant for the gifted child, including for those children who are twice exceptional, i.e. those who are gifted but also have a learning disability.

- **Educating the community**

We need to educate the community in order to dispel the myths that abound about gifted students. These myths include such nonsensical notions as:-

- *'Gifted students will do well no matter what'*

Which is a statement akin to saying you can plant a vegetable patch then completely neglect it and still expect a good crop

- *'Gifted programs are elitist'*

But we offer specialised coaching for children with demonstrated sporting potential. And the Department of Education's values include "A culture of high expectations and high achievement" and its goals "Learners are safe, feel supported and are able to flourish"; one does assume that this includes all learners, including our gifted learners.

- *'Teachers challenge all students so gifted kids will be fine in a regular classroom'*

Challenges that might suit 80% of the class are unlikely to sufficiently provide opportunities to engage higher order thinking in gifted students, and the opportunity to work with intellectual peers is lacking.

- *'All children are gifted'*

All children may have gifts but only a few are intellectually gifted

- *'Acceleration is harmful'*

"acceleration influences high-ability learners in positive ways, especially on academic achievement. An important message for educators, parents and students is that high-ability learners can benefit from acceleration both in the short-term and in the long run"

Saiying Steenbergen-Hu, Sidney M. Moon, 2010, *The Effects of Acceleration on High-Ability Learners: A Meta-Analysis*

Similar evidence is to be found in the work of Dr Karen Rogers (1992); *A Nation Deceived* (2004); and *A Nation Empowered* (2015)

Educating the community to dispel these myths is not so easy! I did not tell my family about the planned radical acceleration for my son. When I finally mentioned it to my brother, his response was "you can't do that in a state school" – actually, I think it was easier to do it in a state school than it would have been in a private school, although "easier" is a relative comparison, not an absolute description of the process.

Educating the community is not so easy – but if we could, in the late 1980s, get a public education campaign that turned around the imminent exponential infection rate for HIV – it is not impossible.

Any media article published that focuses on any aspect of gifted education or gifted students is likely to draw ill informed, negative comments. With the advent of online news publication and the increased ease of making public comments

(compared to the old method of writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper) the number of negative, uninformed and sometimes vitriolic comments in greatly increased.

For example, a Sydney Morning Herald article in June 2019, about a new selective high school in the southwest threw up the usual range of negative comments, urban myths, and general statements by people who simply do not know or understand the needs of gifted students. These included suggestions of exclusivity – which given the area proposed for the school was one of particularly low socioeconomic status – made little sense.

Better understanding of giftedness through the whole community would reduce the need for parents of gifted children to rely on closed social media groups and other support groups to be able to discuss their concerns and joys in relation to their children. Parents should be able to feel comfortable and safe from negative comment or judgment when discussing the highs and lows of parenting their gifted child with any other parent.

- **Educating parents of other students in the schools**

We want the parents of non-gifted students in our schools to understand that:-

- Parents of gifted students are not pushy, we are merely advocating for an appropriate education for our children – as parents of children with disabilities and learning difficulties do;
 - Parents of gifted students did not hothouse our children to have them reading when they came to school – the children worked it out themselves or at least were very instrumental in directing the learning process
“Mummy, will you teach me to read” is only one of the sorts of statements that almost strikes fear into the hearts of parents of gifted children – as a secondary school teacher of the STEM subjects, I had no idea how to go about such a challenge!
 - Parents of gifted students do not coach them to achieve highly in the competitions, they just do what they do;
 - Gifted students who do not want to play or socialise with many others their own age, but prefer older companions or adults are not necessarily socially maladjusted; some may actually be socially more mature than their age peers and are seeking companionship that is closer to their level of maturity;
 - Parents of gifted students are not bad parents because their gifted kids see things in black and white and tell others so; or because the students already know what the teachers are telling them so don't need to hear it again; or identify that an adult made a mistake. Yes, we will try to teach our gifted children to tell you politely, but is it reasonable to ask them to embrace an untruth to help you feel more comfortable?
- **Educating the parents of our gifted students**
We need the parents of gifted students to better understand
 - Aspects of giftedness;
 - Their entitlements, according to system policies etc;
 - How to effectively advocate for their child.

- **Educating our students**

Our non-gifted students

We need to educate our non-gifted students in the affective domain in respect of our gifted students; I will return to this later under the heading of *Values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours* but I would especially like to stress that students need to amend behaviours to eliminate bullying in any form and that working towards increased social acceptance of gifted students, with their quirks and differences is really important. Gifted students, especially those who are non-sporting, rank very low amongst their peers on social acceptance scales.

Our gifted students

We need to educate our gifted students appropriately:-

- With their intellectual peers;

Dr Karen Rogers (and many others) recommend that gifted students should spend at least part of every day with their intellectual peers.

- With challenging but scaffolded curriculum;

This is not just setting them up for failure by expecting them to differentiate their own learning or formulate their own inquiry (yes, I have heard teachers state that to be their expectation) or giving them more difficult worksheets with no instructions.

Gifted students need to be taught underpinning skills and knowledge – they will, no doubt, grasp the concepts quickly.

- With appropriate differentiation; including differentiated content, process, product (Michele Juratowitch, June Maker & others have expanded on this); with differentiated task design (Debbie Youd), and which is learner-centered in rich learning environments (Manoj Chandra-Handa).

Every child has the right to learn something new every day...and to make at least one year's progress in every calendar year

Susan Winebrenner

- With extension and enrichment;

There should be extension opportunities within the curriculum, and enrichment activities outside of the curriculum.

- With appropriate acceleration;

There is plenty of sound evidence to support this, including, as cited above:-

“acceleration influences high-ability learners in positive ways, especially on academic achievement. An important message for educators, parents and students is that high-ability learners can benefit from acceleration both in the short-term and in the long run”

Saiying Steenbergen-Hu, Sidney M. Moon, 2010, *The Effects of Acceleration on High-Ability Learners: A Meta-Analysis*

Similar evidence is to be found in the work of Dr Karen Rogers (1992); A Nation Deceived (2004); and A Nation Empowered (2015)

- In a safe environment.

This means the environment is physically safe (especially from bullying); emotionally safe from snide comments, put-downs, undermining subliminal messages and the like, and intellectually safe to share ideas that may be very different from those of their classmates and teachers.

We want our gifted children to maintain their love of learning, by learning new things every day and making real progress in their learning.

Effective Systems & Structures

- **Legislation**

When I noted legislation as one of the factors underpinning delivery of best practice in gifted education, I did not realise how bad the current situation is until I started to investigate further. In my opinion, our state's Education Act 2016 is in need of:-

- **Removal or amendment of sections that prohibit evidence based practices or allows them only on ministerial instruction;**

Tasmania's current legislation (The Education Act 2016) prohibits at least one research based accelerative practice: dual enrolment.

"(13)(4) A school-aged child may not be enrolled at more than one school unless the child –

*(a) has **disability**; and*

(b) is a member of a class of school-aged children that the Ministerial instructions allows to be enrolled at more than one school; and

(c) is enrolled in accordance with the Ministerial instructions."

But there appears to be no ministerial instruction for dual enrolment of gifted students.

I have not examined the legislation for its implications for grade skipping acceleration, or concurrent enrolment in school and university.

- **Inclusion of sections that incorporate evidence based practices for gifted education.**

Early Entry is currently a ministerial instruction, not part of the legislation; this would desirably be a practice enshrined in the legislation along with other forms of grade skipping acceleration, which are supported by sound research evidence.

- **Teacher registration authorities**

- **Approved Initial Teacher Registration Programs to include a compulsory semester of gifted education;**

The Tasmanian Teacher Registration Board approves courses offered by the University of Tasmania; the 2001 Senate Inquiry recommended that

“newly graduated teachers have at least a semester unit on the special needs of gifted children in their degrees. This should include training in identification of gifted children and the pedagogy of teaching them”.

It is not an unreasonable dream to see this actually implemented 19 years down the track from the publishing of those recommendations.

- **Registration of Teachers from other jurisdictions to be subject to satisfactory demonstration of knowledge of gifted education or completion of a unit of professional learning.**

The 2001 senate inquiry also recommended that:-

“The Commonwealth should specify professional development on issues to do with giftedness as a priority”

So requiring this of our existing registered teachers, and for registration of teachers from other jurisdictions, is also not unreasonable.

- **Teacher professional standards**

- **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to include specific requirements about educating gifted students**

The standards specific to Graduate teachers have some generic statements about understanding development and characteristics and specifically mention a range of diversities, disability and aboriginality but not gifted students; the standards specify differentiation across the range of abilities but classroom differentiation alone is insufficient for students who are moderately (highly, etc) gifted.

Also, differentiation without an understanding of how to differentiate effectively for gifted students may not be very effective. Effective differentiation for gifted students has been mentioned above.

A scan of the 2018 review of the standards does not find reference to gifted students.

- **Policies**

- **Policies should be worded to ensure commitment**

The policies that define how our educators work with gifted students need the language in them strengthened to make certain actions mandatory. Tasmania’s Department of Education (DoE), in its procedures for gifted students, defines the differences in language: mandatory “MUST”, directory “IS TO” and discretionary “MAY”. A quick scan of the internet suggests to me that *Mandatory* means that there will be consequences if the action is not carried out whereas *Directory* means that there will be no consequences.

The Law Handbook for South Australia defines

Directory: a provision that does not have to be strictly complied with; not mandatory.

The DoE *Extended Learning For Gifted Students* procedures are full of directory statements; a type of statement that the Law Handbook for South Australia tells us does not have to be strictly complied with. It is not good enough that DoE considers that the responsibilities of departmental leaders, principals, teachers and school psychologists do not including having to comply with providing appropriately for gifted students.

Some statements in the procedures for acceleration are even more lukewarm, using only discretionary language:

*A student who is not being fully engaged and/or extended at their year level through differentiated curriculum that extends the level of challenge, depth and breadth of their learning **may** be referred to the school principal for consideration for acceleration.*

*If the evidence collected indicates that the student is placed among the top 2% of their age peers in at least one area of the curriculum, the principal **may** discuss the possibility of being accelerated with the student and their parent/s or carer/s.*

*If the information collected indicates the student is among the top 2% of their age peers in one or two areas of learning and not in others, the evaluation team **may** consider them for learning area (subject) acceleration only in subjects related to those areas of strength.*

*If the information collected indicates the student is among the top 2% of their age peers across all learning areas, the evaluation team **may** consider the student for year level acceleration.*

I recognise that not all students who have ability at or above the 98th percentile, either across all or within selected learning areas are suited for acceleration but it should be an option considered and discussed with relevant parties in accordance with evidenced based practice. Tools such as the IOWA Acceleration Scale are useful (although not adapted for students with dual exceptionalities) and Feldhusen's guidelines, although dated are still, in my opinion, sound. After appropriate consideration it might be decided not to accelerate the student, however, it should be an option considered.

- **Policies should be based on need and best practice**

We need much stronger policies, which are based on need and best practice. Acceleration is a case in point; there is a wealth of evidence to support it, yet DoE procedures concede that it may be considered. Similarly, best practice supports like-ability grouping; the closest that the *Extended Learning For Gifted Students* procedure comes to addressing this is a cryptic reference to flexible grouping and learning pathways.

- **Policies should be UNIVERSALLY implemented**

It goes without saying that we would like the policies to be known, understood and universally implemented. At all levels. And in all schools. By all principals, teachers and school psychologists.

- **School structures**

Our schools need to have a number of embedded structures that enhance the chances of *all* gifted students being identified and effectively educated to maximise their potential.

- **Identification of Gifted Students**

Identification needs to be as early as possible – with much better promotion of and use of early entry for those who are eligible. Gagné suggests in his 10 commandments that early entry could be expanded from the current top 2% to the top 10%

We need identification not only of those who are intellectually gifted and academically talented but the full range of gifted students including

- Twice exceptional students

- Gifted underachievers

- Asynchronous developers

- Those who are gifted in only some areas of strength

- The full range of diversity, including across the full range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds

- Mildly gifted through to profoundly gifted

- Identification without a predetermined idea of how many gifted students will be “allowed” (reference Gagné)

- **Pretesting**

- Best practice and the Australian Curriculum tells us we should be pre-testing. There needs to be systemic pretesting at the start of all units of work, with appropriate modification of classroom learning plans so that we don't bore kids by trying to teach them what they already know.

- **Flexibility**

- It is important that, while all attempts are made to identify gifted students early, it is recognised that some might slip through the cracks, that some might not show their potential until later. Our school systems need to be flexible enough to identify and allow students to have their educational needs met at all stages in their education.

- It is also important that if particular provisions do not prove suitable for a gifted child that there is support for the child to find more appropriate provisions and no judgement or stigma attached to moving from one form of provision to another.

- **Like ability grouping**

- Gagné, in his 10 commandments, points out that gifted students universally receive minimal enrichment in mixed ability classes and by grouping them and allocating teacher/s with gifted learning experience, it reduced the potential cost of needing additional staff

for pull-out enrichment programs. Catering to the needs of a group with a reduced spread of ability can be much more effective in meeting needs across the range of curriculum subjects/learning areas.

- **Mentoring programs**

We need improved access to mentors specific to the interests of gifted students. Karen Rogers identifies the “effect size” of mentoring to be a significant advantage to gifted students.

- **Selective schools or classes**

Despite “department representative” (presumably from DoE) comment to the contrary in a 2019 article in the Sunday Tasmanian calling for selective schools, Tasmania certainly does have enough gifted students (even if DoE does not identify the majority of theirs) for partially selective schools or selective classes within schools.

There are a number of models on which such a structure could be based:

New South Wales; of its 50 well established selective schools, 50% are partially selective;

Victoria, has fewer fully selective schools, but offers the SEAL Academy programme through 40 schools statewide. This programme provides accelerated learning by telescoping grades 7-10 into a 3-year programme;

South Australia, in a similar position to Victoria, only has 4 fully selective high schools but has 25 partially selective schools which offers the IGNITE programme which provides accelerated learning with varied foci by telescoping grades 8-10 into a 2 year programme;

Western Australia has 25 partially selective high schools;

Queensland has 1 partially selective high school;

Models such as the Kedron State High School Accelerated learning program

https://kedronshs.eq.edu.au/Supportandresources/Formsanddocuments/Documents/ksh2479_kedron_accelerated_application_form_v211.pdf

Might be well worth investigating

“Selective high schools cater for academically gifted students with high potential who may otherwise be without sufficient classmates of their own academic standard. Selective high schools help these students to learn by grouping them with students of similar ability, using specialised teaching methods and materials.

Selective high schools are unzoned so parents can apply regardless of where they live”.

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/selective-high-schools-and-opportunity-classes/year-7/what-are-selective-high-schools/places-available-in-selective-high-school>

- **Accelerated learning**

I could write (and have previously) written as much about acceleration as I have written about everything else in this document. There are many forms and there is much evidence, compiled over more than half a century, to support well planned and well implemented accelerated learning for appropriate students, including practices such as:

- Grade skipping
- Subject acceleration
- Curriculum compacting
- Curriculum telescoping

- **Dual enrolment**

Dual enrolment is, in itself, a form of acceleration involving enrolment in two or more school levels, for example

- Primary – secondary
- Secondary – high school
- High school – senior secondary college
- Senior secondary – university

Or even bigger “jumps” – eg Arlo from Tasmania’s North West Coast who topped pure maths 1 at the University of New England while in grade 7

<https://www.theadvocate.com.au/story/6213615/arlo-taylor-the-young-genius-with-an-electric-guitar/>

- **Creative individual learning plans**

Good, creative individual learning plans should:

- Involve parents and students in their formulation.
- Involve thinking outside the box – going outside what is offered by the department or school systems.

- **Enrichment and extension**

The possibilities for enrichment are endless; those that engage gifted students for an ongoing project or ongoing activities are probably best value – LEGO robotics, AMC challenges. They must be appealing to and relevant to the student. Random, ad-hoc activities that are little more than time fillers are not appropriate.

- **Gifted student specialist**

A person identified as responsible for the appropriate identification and education of gifted students is needed in every school, and that person needs to have qualifications or substantial demonstrated expertise in and a real passion for gifted education. It is not enough to have the gifted education person as just someone allocated to that responsibility if they do not have the qualifications, skills and aptitude for it.

Overseas experience shows that gifted students, from low socioeconomic backgrounds especially, who have access to gifted specialists are more likely to develop the knowledge and skills to source funding opportunities and scholarships to take their education further.

- **Resourcing**

Appropriate resourcing for gifted students includes:-

Appropriate staffing: teachers with specialized qualifications, skills and passion, not only in their subject areas, but also in the field of gifted education.

The senate inquiry 2001 recommended that *“education authorities should require that teachers in selective schools and classes have suitable gifted education qualifications. The authorities should ensure that the necessary professional development is available.”*

I would suggest that there should be at least one person in each school who has gifted education qualifications, and any person allocated to a selective class or school should also, and all staff should have adequate professional learning in gifted education.

Equitable funding for gifted students. I am not an economist but equitable funding might involve:-

- Targeting / sharing existing funding more evenly;

- Allocating specific e.g. literacy/numeracy funding to also improve the outcomes for those with high potential;

- Reassessing expensive political priorities (year 11-12 into high schools).

Some options do not require that much funding other than teacher professional learning, for example like ability grouping, acceleration, selective or partially selective schools.

- **Keeping the senior secondary colleges viable**

Our senior secondary colleges allow for a critical mass of students with similar interests, aptitudes and abilities to be catered for with curriculum appropriate to their aspirations and capabilities. The colleges also are very effective in supporting students' social and emotional development into young adults and their transition between school and the pathway they choose next.

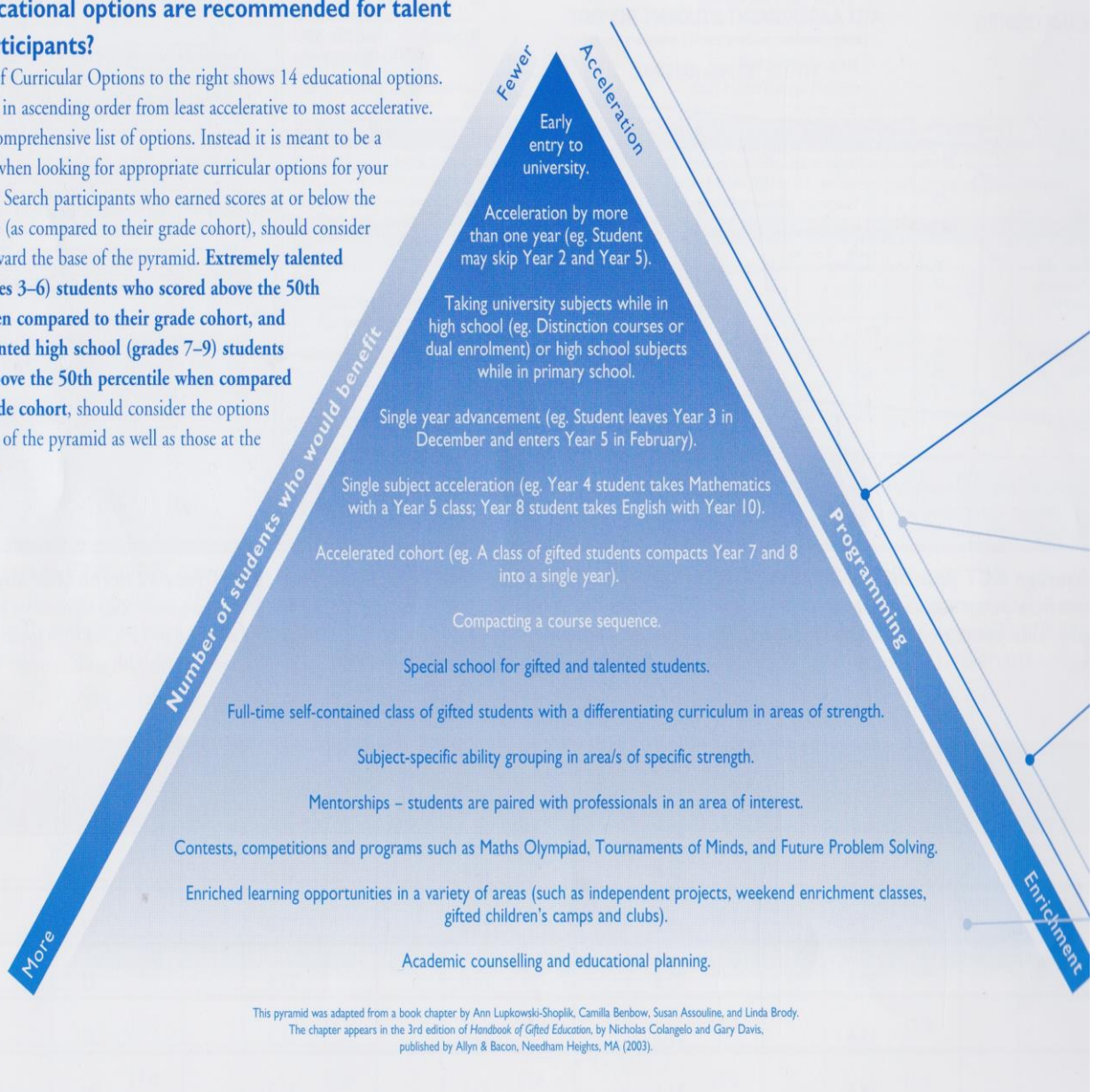
- **Honesty!**
When school or system personnel, or our political leaders, talk about what schools offer for gifted students, it would be really good if all could do so honestly, and be open to opportunities for improvement to *fully* meet the needs of *all* gifted students, rather than regale us with self-congratulatory statements that could politely be described as gilding the lily.

- **A range of curricular options**
Taken from the University of New South Wales, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Center (GERRIC)'s Australian Primary Talent Search documentation for parents, this pyramid of curricular options is an excellent illustration of what is desirable. We can relate the options also to the range from mildly gifted at the bottom of the pyramid to highly gifted (and more) at the top of the pyramid.

It is most important to ensure that gifted students are catered for according to their level of giftedness

What educational options are recommended for talent search participants?

The Pyramid of Curricular Options to the right shows 14 educational options. They are listed in ascending order from least accelerative to most accelerative. This is not a comprehensive list of options. Instead it is meant to be a starting point when looking for appropriate curricular options for your student. Talent Search participants who earned scores at or below the 50th percentile (as compared to their grade cohort), should consider the options toward the base of the pyramid. **Extremely talented primary (grades 3–6) students who scored above the 50th percentile when compared to their grade cohort, and extremely talented high school (grades 7–9) students who scored above the 50th percentile when compared with their grade cohort,** should consider the options toward the top of the pyramid as well as those at the base of the list.



Values, Beliefs, Attitudes & Behaviours

Some of the affective domain attributes that I would like to see embraced in respect of working with our gifted students:

Accept	Encourage	Respect
Acclaim	Identify	Respond
Acknowledge	Internalize	Support
Advocate	Mentor	Understand
Appreciate	Nurture	Value
Commend	Recognize	

At all levels, from the very highest level down to our gifted students' classmates, we want our students' giftedness to be recognised, understood and accepted; we want their needs not only acknowledged but also responded to and nurtured; we want their potential respected, encouraged, appreciated and valued – these are our brightest and our best and they are our chance to fix the mess that we, and previous generations, have made of this planet. We want to see them encouraged and their achievements commended and acclaimed – at least to the level of their sporting peers.

From our leaders – political & educational, from those who teach our teachers, from educators, community, other parents, and onto other students, we'd like everyone to truly internalise these attributes.

There are additional considerations for our educators. For a while now the training for some of our health professionals has required some time spent on self analysis of values and attitudes in respect of mental illness with the result of changed beliefs and behaviour.

In the same vein, I would also like to see those directly responsible for educating our gifted students take the time to confront their own deep seated values and beliefs and evaluate what subliminal attitudes they may hold towards gifted students and how their consequent offhand or throw-away lines might deeply impact gifted students. Professor Miraca Gross talks about *revenge egalitarianism*, subconscious envy of the potential of gifted students which can result in hostile and unfounded objections to appropriate provisions for the gifted.

To work on relinquishing any negativity which might loiter in the subconscious, relinquishing any adherence to urban myths and untruths, relinquishing any sense of unease or threat that a student's knowledge of or ability in some subjects might exceed their own, and replace this with appropriate identification, catering for and celebration of the gifted students in their care, advocating for them and mentoring them to reach their potential and to model all that is good in working with gifted students is part of my dream!

It would be great to see all other kids be kind and generally nice to our gifted kids, to accept them and value their differences, to invite them to participate and to try to understand their differences. To offer support when they experience challenges and to be supportive and respectful of and help to celebrate their achievements.

Relationships

I have discussed many of the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours that impact on the relationships that a gifted child and his/her family have with others. The range of relationships includes:

School – parent

School –child

Teacher – parent

Teacher – child

Parent – other parents

Gifted child – other children

While it would be wonderful to dream of the day when a parent does not need to advocate for the needs of their gifted child, because the needs are being met by effective systems and well trained teachers who support and value the gifted child, until that time it would be wonderful to imagine that a school would be receptive and responsive to approaches from parents about their child's needs. Where parental advocacy is not perceived as "THAT" pushy parent but parent voices are heard and their perspectives valued. It would be wonderful for parents, including those who are professionals in their own field to feel they may be confident advocates and do not need to tread a fine line so as not to upset school personnel.

It would be wonderful for parents of gifted students to be able to talk openly to other parents about the joys and frustrations of parenting and educating gifted students, rather than feel they are being perceived as either skiting or making up problems – because why would you have problems when your child is so bright? In respect of the radical acceleration of my son, a very close friend still refers to it as "pushing him forward". This was not, and is not, his perception of the situation.

Listening to our gifted students: Reflections from a gifted young adult

What worked really well for you at school?

"I think that something that worked quite well overall was receiving opportunities to be continuously challenged. This meant that I developed the skills to learn new things quickly as required, and I generally didn't have many situations where I overly relied on existing knowledge to carry me through without active learning. It also ensured that perceived academic challenges as things to be overcome, instead of as unexpected blows to my self-esteem.

These opportunities were both systematic (e.g. a two year acceleration during high-school), and ad-hoc extensions (e.g. participating in Lego Robotics competitions). I see both of these types of opportunities as being important to my overall positive experience around being challenged. Ad-hoc extension alone would have been insufficient if paired with the frustrations of being limited during day-to-day school work, while acceleration would likely have been less successful if I had relied entirely on the base high-school curriculum."

What worked really badly for you at school?

"Reflecting back on the content of my education, I feel that one of the most frustrating aspects was the focus on achieving 'well-rounded' results. I believe this comes from an assumption that the curriculum available covers content that is wholly necessary, and so achievement gaps in a certain area will be meaningful in the future.

However my experience contradicts this - for example I typically received fairly average marks in English related courses. It has turned out that the content of these courses has not been particularly relevant to my work, despite requiring extensive amounts of technical & persuasive writing.

The impact of the focus on achieving well-rounded results was an expectation to spend large amounts of time on content for which I had little affinity, or enjoyment in studying. I believe it would have been better to generally focus on my strengths, within reason, as this would have lead to a more positive experience with learning at school. Interestingly, this idea of focussing on developing areas of strength instead of areas of weakness is one of the core lessons in the management book 'First, Break All The Rules', which presents focussing on strengths, not weaknesses as one of the key aspects of highly effective development."

What else could have been done for you to improve things?

"Since beginning work, I have continued to focus on continuous self-learning, typically using books & online resources. Something that has struck me is the quantity of extremely high-quality content available for learning, even in highly specific areas. Highly informative (and charismatic) speakers can deliver a recorded presentation, which can then be watched by 10s of thousand (or far more) interested people. Similarly, the writer of an exceptional book can help potentially millions of people learn that content.

I think that there is tremendous opportunity to leverage this type of asymmetrical content delivery in order to provide extended learning opportunities in relatively specific areas that interest high-achieving students. My experience was that often extension learning was limited by corresponding domain knowledge of my teachers, whereas utilising the variety of open learning content now available online would have opened up much valuable learning."

Conclusion

Over the years processes and programs for gifted students have come and gone, often according to political and other leadership whims. It is time to take what is working and supplement and expand it to encompass the identification of all gifted students, then implementing it to meet their educational needs, all day, every day, for all gifted students.