

Dear Ms Lisa Paul and members of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review,

I am writing to you in despair. As a teacher of gifted children for 30 years, I feel I have been swimming against a tsunami and it has taken all my energy.

If gifted education were a part of ITE, I could happily retire, but right now I can't. I have been witness to too many social and emotional issues over this time to let these kids, who exist in EVERY class, continue to suffer. The mantra exists that these kids do not need any interventions because they are already advantaged, They are not. Instead, I am stressed and worn out by the mental health issues of these kids; issues that exist because their specific needs are not being met by any education system that exists in Australia. I am sick of seeing these kids self-harming, becoming disengaged, not reaching their potential and stuck in psychologist's offices. Issues that exist because these kids cannot make friends because of the lock step progression of these systems that keep them with aged peers instead of intellectual peers. If teachers understood acceleration or advanced learning pathways this would not be an issue. Issues that exist because these kids have co-morbidities - ADD, ASD, dyslexia and processing disorders just to name a few. Issues that exist because teachers just do not know what to do with these kids when they present in their classes. These teachers have never been taught how to assess and identify and cater for the specific learning needs of these kids. It is a very complex area.

I was a mentor teacher to many state universities for decades to advocate for these kids, because the universities did not teach this subject at all. I wanted preservice teachers in my room to see how these kids present, what a diverse group they are - Aboriginal, disabled, migrant, EALD, low SES, rural and remote. I need preservice teachers to understand that these kids would be in their future classrooms and they needed to cater for them. This is a very lonely place for me to be - doing the job of universities.

As a mentor teacher I have seen the power that ITE courses have in preservice teachers when done well. Visible learning is a really good example. Just imagine if preservice teachers came into schools armed with the right tools to make a difference to ALL kids, not just a few. Our international rankings would increase for start. That makes governments happy - and could attract extra funding.

Many different government enquiries have considered gifted education and reported on the need for initial teacher education to include a compulsory unit on gifted education. Some of these include:

Report by the Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children 1988,

Senate Inquiry into the Education of the Gifted and Talented 2001, amongst its hearings found:

“The main theme that emerged in the inquiry is the need for better teacher training (both preservice and inservice) so that teachers are better able to identify the gifted and make provision for their special needs. Better curriculum support is also essential so that teachers can differentiate the curriculum for the gifted.”

Productivity Commission Research Report, Schools Workforce, April 2012, which reported:

“...it is also important to recognise the learning needs of gifted and talented students who have the potential to excel beyond the achievements of an average student.” (p268)

Despite all these inquiries, reports, and findings there is still no inclusion of a compulsory unit on gifted education included in initial teacher training. The AITSL teaching standards do not include gifted students anywhere. They are a missing piece of the classroom puzzle.

Quality teaching, and thus a quality education for gifted students is primarily met by teachers in mainstream classrooms. It is essential for teachers during initial teacher training to develop an understanding in the needs of gifted students and the appropriate pedagogies and identification processes so that can provide a rigorous, engaging learning experience when they start classroom teaching.

I urge you to make a unit of study in gifted education compulsory in all initial teaching programs across Australia.

Yours faithfully,