

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

I am writing to you as a parent of gifted children, a teacher of gifted children, and an adult who wasn't identified as gifted until they were in their late 30s. I have had to educate the educators about my child. A journey that has often been tumultuous, time consuming and futile. However, I have seen both the positive impacts of teachers implementing evidence based practices.

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.

Gifted students are the most marginalised group in the Australian education system. Their needs are continually put to one side and seen as less urgent than other groups of students. They are also the group of students who will have the biggest impact on improving our PISA rating. We continue to ignore the group whose potential we should be leveraging.

Although Leta Hollingsworth, an early researcher in giftedness, intelligence and advocate for gifted education, addressed the myth that gifted students do not need additional support and will succeed on their own over 80 years ago (Hollingsworth, 1937), teachers are still sent into classrooms ill-equipped to challenge and teach Australia's gifted students. They are sent into classrooms with misconceptions based on anecdotal evidence and lack evidence based training. This lack of quality teacher training looks like the gifted child who appears to be an average student, but whose giftedness and disability mask each other. It looks like the child sitting at the back of the room, alone with a pile of books teaching themselves, while their classmates learn on the mat together with the teacher. It looks like the gifted child who has given up trying and settles for just good enough because they get bullied for being too smart. It looks like the angry, defiant and impulsive gifted child who refuses to write because they've done the work countless times before. It looks like the compliant, teacher pleasing gifted student who is sliding towards depression because they don't have any like-minded peers in their class. It looks like the 18% - 25% of gifted students who drop out of school

(Robertson, 1991) and up to 20% of prison inmates who are identified as gifted (Streznewski, as cited in Rodov, 2014).

Gagné's DMGT (2004) is widely used or referenced in Australian school and government policies for gifted and talented programs (Henderson & Jarvis, 2016). The model has been refined since its first publication in 1985, with the most recent version explicitly including a developmental process component and a 'formal definition for the talent development process: the systematic pursuit by talentees, over a significant and continuous period of time, of a structured program of activities leading to a specific excellence goal.' (Gagné, 2013). The Developmental Process has three distinct elements - activities, progress and investment. Each of these elements require the 'talentee' to have access to resources, planning, and monitoring, again highlighting the structured and targeted support a gifted student will need in order for them to develop their gifts into talents.

The catalysts in the developmental process are categorised as environmental and intrapersonal. Within the environmental component, a students' development from gifted to talented will be impacted by the provisions that they can access. These are listed as enrichment and administrative. Both these elements require identification, adjustments, planning and support for gifted students and are provided to the students by external agencies (Gagné, 2004, 2010, 2013).

In conjunction with the influence that provisions play in gifted development are the beliefs held by teachers and mentors about gifted students and the relationships they have with these students. These factors can impact on a student's motivation to engage with their giftedness and their developmental process (Gagné, 2004, 2010, 2013).

Backgrounding the aforementioned elements is that of chance. Chance recognises the 'degree of control a person possesses' in relation to the other influences (Gagné, 2013). It is the element of chance that causes the greatest inequities in the support that gifted students are provided and further highlights the misunderstanding that gifted students will succeed on their own without additional support. As students do not have control over many aspects of their development from giftedness to talent, it is essential that those in a position to provide this structured support do so. Too few or poor-quality catalysts means that a student's potential won't be realised, showing that relevant and purposeful teacher training is essential to support our gifted young people to succeed.

The complex interaction between the four components of Gagné's DMGT 2.0 (2012) will be unique for each gifted student as gifted students are not a homogenous group (Reis & Renzulli, 2009). As formal education plays a role in all four components and all Australian students of compulsory school age must be enrolled in and remain in education, training or employment until they are 17 years old ("ACARA - School structures", 2021), the education system has a significant role, both positive and negative, in the development of gifted students. It is imperative for gifted students to succeed that additional support is put in place and that their teachers are able to 'distinguish 'real' talent development from inadequate provisions' (Gagné, 2013). This support can only be put in place by teachers who have had specific and evidence based education in this area.

Given that the estimates of gifted students who are significantly underachieving ranges from 10% (Wills, L & Munro, as cited in Revisiting gifted education, 2019) to 57% (Peterson, J & Colangelo, N, as cited in Revisiting gifted education, 2019) it is imperative that for gifted

students to succeed, appropriate and targeted support is put in place. Betts and Neihart (1988) propose six profiles of gifted students to provide 'guidelines for identifying gifted children' that can then be 'used to develop appropriate educational goals for the gifted' child. Betts and Neihart present their view of gifted students through a 'gestalt' lens rather than focusing on 'intellectual abilities, talents or interests'. Their six types of gifted students are; 'The Successful, The Creative, The Underground, The At-Risk, The Twice/Multi Exceptional and the Autonomous Learner' (Betts & Neihart, 2010). It is interesting to note that Betts and Neihart identify support strategies for all profiles of gifted students including the 'Autonomous Learner', stating that these students need 'More support not less'.

The 'perceptions of giftedness and gifted children have been shaped not by facts but by fallacies; not by reality but by myths and misconceptions' (Gross, as cited in Chessman, n.d.). In a country that is 'notorious for knocking down its tall poppies' (ABC, 2002) and believes that 'special intellectual gifts give you a free ride through life' (ABC, 2002), it is difficult for teachers to advocate for and appropriately cater for their gifted students, if they themselves are not appropriately trained.

As mentioned above, the recommendations made during the 1988 and 2001 Senate inquiries into the education of gifted and talented students support provisions for gifted students and teacher training in gifted education (Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, 1988; Collins, 2001). The perpetuation of this myth was noted in the 2012 Victorian Government's Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented learners, 'One of the most common myths associated with giftedness is that gifted students will succeed at school without any special provisions or assistance' (Southwick, 2012).

The disparity between the training requirements for teachers regarding students with learning difficulties and gifted students is highlighted in Submission 206 of the 2001 Senate Inquiry, 'The majority of universities do not offer gifted education courses as either an elective or mandatory component of preservice teacher training courses. Special Education is however a mandatory requirement (Collins, 2001). Mandating teachers to undertake training for one group of students and not another other, perpetuates the myth that gifted students don't need specialised support and will achieve on their own as their provision is not prioritised in line with other students with special educational needs. This needs to change. Gifted students need teachers who are appropriately trained to support their specialised educational needs.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, ("Teacher Standards", n.d.) has been endorsed by all State and Territory Education Ministers. Knowing how students learn is Focus Area 1 of the standards. Although intellectual development of students is listed as a facet of this area, the ability to 'Select from a flexible and effective repertoire' of strategies is only required at the Highly Accomplished level. Further to this, Focus Area 1.5, requires differentiation to 'meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities' ("Teacher Standards", n.d.) with the effective use of student data to inform teaching, only required at the Highly Accomplished level.

Although other groups of students with specialised needs are specifically targeted by a dedicated standard, gifted students are not. In fact, the word 'gifted' do not appear at all in the 32-page document. The omission of the term 'gifted' and the lack of focus on the

specific needs of gifted students leads to the assumption that gifted students do not need additional support because they are included in the focus areas that address differentiating for students of all ability levels. The teacher standards perpetuate the myth that gifted students don't need support as differentiation for all levels and support for students with special needs and cultural considerations are separated ("Teacher Standards", n.d.). This is why it is essential that teachers are required to undertake training in gifted education and that this is also reinforced in the AITSL standards.

The research overwhelmingly reports that teachers who engage in specialist gifted training are more likely to hold positive beliefs about gifted students and their educational needs, identify gifted students, differentiate appropriately and provide challenging and supportive learning environments for gifted students (Chessman, 2010; Collins, 2001; Fraser-Seeto, Howard & Woodcock, 2016; Gindy, 2015; Henderson & Jarvis, 2016; Hsieh, 2010; Rogers & Vialle, 2012; 1988; Southwick, 2012; Tischler & Vialle, 2009). The converse is also true. Teachers who have little or poor training in gifted education, believe common misconceptions about gifted students, do not hold positive beliefs about gifted students, appropriately identify or cater for the needs of the gifted students in their classroom (Jung & Hay, 2018).

Given that the majority of Australian teachers are not required to undertake specialist training in gifted education during their initial training, many teachers commence their careers with little to no training specifically related to gifted students. 'Of the 37 universities in Australia which offer education at the undergraduate level, only 3 currently have a compulsory, stand-alone gifted education unit within their undergraduate programs' (Gindy, 2015). This means that the majority of Australian teachers are sent into classrooms poorly equipped to identify and support the learning needs of their gifted students. They are also unable to identify or challenge the myths held about this group of students.

In their article, Henderson and Jarvis (2016) put forward the case for a gifted dimension to be added to the professional standards for teachers. This, they argue, will ensure that the needs for gifted students are placed within a framework that already dictates standards for groups of students with specialised learning needs. This standard will also eliminate the conundrum surrounding provision and funding for students with specialised educational needs. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, state that 'understanding and exploring the Standards will help you [teachers] to grow and develop as a professional' ("Learning from practice workbooks", n.d.). Including a specific gifted dimension to the professional standards, will require teachers to engage in professional development in gifted education in order to fulfil their teacher registration requirements.

We need your support to 'collaborate as a nation, explicitly incorporating gifted into our curriculum, teaching standards, under-graduate studies and on-going post-graduate professional development' (Gindy 2015) because 'When teachers engage in quality professional development, enhanced knowledge and skills improve their teaching... their improved teaching then enhances their students' outcomes' ("Effective professional development", 2021).

The cumulative effect of teacher training is essential because 'where there are three or more teachers trained, provision for gifted students increases significantly. Where five or more

teachers are trained the commitment is even higher' (Submission 227, as cited in Collins, 2001). Increasing the knowledge and commitment of teaching staff will contribute to the gifted student population's access to appropriate resources and will contribute to support structures that will allow them to develop their gifts into talents. The impact of these provisions benefits more than just the individual gifted students as 'The greater the number of students who realise their full learning potential, the greater the cumulative lift will be in our overall national performance (Gonski et al., 2018).

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.

We should not be looking to close the gap, but to move the whole bell curve to the right.

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