

I come from a long line of educators with more than 65% of extended family all ending up in teaching or academic leadership and consultancy. I didn't choose the same path but have tremendous respect for a teacher's role and contribution to individual pupils and society collectively.

After an incredibly difficult time with our daughter since the start of the academic year 2021 (preceded by a fantastic year in kindy 2020), we were finally enlightened as to her giftedness when we requested a meeting with the school's learning support coordinator following her having conducted some assessments with our daughter. The learning support coordinator was incredibly knowledgeable and experienced and everything she said to us not only made sense but resonates deeply; the program changes she sent into motion within 24hrs saw an immediate change/relief to the agony that school had become for our daughter and for us as a family.

This was 4.5 months after having first spoken to our daughter's class teacher, who is a trained, graduate, teacher. Her opinion and advice had been that the behaviour changes we were observing were normal, was probably tiredness, and ultimately that we should let her be a little 5 year old girl. Not sure how she thought we had any other option but to let her be just that but it was incredibly frustrating for us to discover that the teacher from her kindy class last year had known straightaway that our daughter was different, acknowledged her difference, and catered to it without it ever upsetting her or requiring our input or involvement; and yet somehow this year's teacher had no concept of what to do with a gifted child, despite having been informed at handover that our child was reading books far in advance of her peers, and not only dismissed that advancement, opted to send her home with readers at the same level of her peers (level 1/2/3 when in kindy she had been reading easily levels 22/23/24 to her teacher then), and told us that we should let her be as her peers were.

It was not helpful to us. Our child wasn't impressed. She was increasingly disengaged, disenchanted with school, her personality had changed so much, she was so incredibly unhappy; it was heartbreaking to watch unfold and so confusing for us. On the contrary to letting her be a 5 year old little girl, her "trying" to be THAT little 5 year old in the box where her teacher thought she should fit comfortably, was frustrating her immensely.

Further discussions led us to realise that the teacher held suspicions and bias that our daughter's state of advancement was purely because we were driving it. As working parents who run our own business and work round the clock; we did not have the luxury of driving anything, let alone teach anything. We selected play-based daycares and schools because we in no way opt for academic priority. And yet, this was the path our daughter had chosen. And again this was where the learning support coordinator's input was crucial in identifying the gap in the teacher's knowledge, educating her, and supporting her — short of which, the teacher herself, having graduated within the last 5 years, was to be found very lacking in terms of knowledge and insight on the area of working with gifted children and understanding the common challenges faced by such children.

Though they may be a minority, we as parents need our children's educators, the professionals in whom we place our trust in all things pertaining to our child's educational development, to be fully aware of the existence, diversity, and requirements of a gifted child. For where else is a parent to turn to discover these things?

My husband and I both hold tertiary qualifications, yet the notion that our child is gifted or the myriad affect this would have on her and the world around her, would never have crossed our minds — while we are professionals in our fields respectively, we rely on the professionals in the field of education to provide their expertise in this regard. Had we not had the chance encounter with our daughter's teacher from the previous year and had the opportunity to share with her all that had transpired this year and the ensuing shoulder-tapping from her on the learning support coordinator, nothing would have eventuated, we would not have discovered and learnt all that we have in the last 6 weeks, and we likely would have ended up taking our child out of school as she was simply too unhappy.

When the learning support coordinator recognised that our daughter was in advance of her peers and assessments confirmed that gap to be approximately 2.5yrs ahead, she created opportunities for our daughter to have social, mental, and academic interactions at the appropriate level - the change in our daughter was immediately tangible. Within 48hours we could see that those interactions were meaningful to her; that the stimulation they provided stabilised her emotionally and socially. Within 4 days, her personality returned to what we had known her to be prior to the start of school in February. We saw her so enthused for learning and so invigorated by it that other aspects of her life, such as sport, outside of school saw significant surge in focus, drive, and success.

She had suffered unnecessarily for close to 5 months...all because her teacher this year had been inadequately trained/exposed. That can change, easily...and it should.