

SUBMISSION TO THE EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE
AN INQUIRY INTO IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIANS
OF ALL AGES

SUBMITTED 26JULY2012by

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With the support of the Collaborative Research Community (CRC)¹

My background in making this submission

I work as an independent Gifted Education Consultant in Perth Western Australia. I am a former teacher and parent to two gifted young adults and have nearly 20 years experience working with gifted children. In 2001 I established *Thinking Ahead Extension Workshops* in order to formally provide opportunities for gifted children, their parents and teachers. In addition to my initial teaching qualification I hold a Certificate of Gifted Education (Distinction) and Master of Education (Gifted and Talented) (Distinction). I continue to be actively involved with state, national and international bodies representing the interests of gifted children and remain an active researcher in the gifted community, presenting regularly at conferences in Australia and overseas.

I present my submission in written format and do not request an opportunity to appear before the Committee to present my case.

PROBLEM 1-- TEACHERTRAINING

Teacher skills and effectiveness are negatively affected by the acceptance of students into Teacher Training courses at University with scores too low for entry into any other university course.

Teaching has become a 'course of last resort' and graduates enter the classroom inadequately prepared to teach able students.

RELATED TERM OF REFERENCE

Factors influencing positive or negative childhood development from birth to Year 12.

¹The aim of the research group is to support and facilitate individual and collaborative research, communication and publication

ISSUES ARISING -TEACHER QUALITY

Teacher quality is directly linked to student outcomes. Lower quality input generates lower quality outputs.

Australia's concern regarding falling standards of student achievement in a global setting and WA's concern about rankings nationally may be tied to its willingness to accept lower quality candidates into teaching degrees, and then to inadequately prepared them for the students they will find in their classrooms.

The research of James Stronge² (College of William and Mary, USA) focuses on teacher effectiveness and outlines the way gains from effective teachers can still be evident after three to five years. *Similarly the negative impact of ineffective teachers is also still evident 3-5 years later.* While our children may be able to 'recover' from one 'bad' year (in which they make little learning gain) two such years back to back have significant long term impact on learning trajectory. Lost learning time is lost. The resulting impact on motivation, particularly for gifted students, is significant and cumulative.

*The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People*³ formulated in 2008 formalises national goals for educating our young people for following 10 year period. The stated aims of these goals are that:

- Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.
- All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

Students spend the vast majority of their learning time at school and are, therefore, largely dependent on their teachers for establishing conditions where these goals can be met. Teachers who themselves have poorly developed skills in mathematics, writing, grammar or spelling (key skills for literacy and numeracy learning on which our curriculum depends heavily) are unable to establish effective learning environments for students whose skills and ability may exceed their own, resulting in poorer outcomes for students than may be achieved with a more able teacher. Poor outcomes occur for students generally, but in particular for the highly able and gifted students in their classrooms.

Our gifted young people are our most precious natural resource. There are gifted students in virtually every classroom, across all socio-economic levels of society. Yet our teachers continue to

² Strange, J. (2007) *Qualities of Effective Teachers 2nd Edition*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development Alexandria, VA

³ *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People in Australia 2008 - 2017.*

http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf

enter the classroom unprepared to recognise, or nurture, gifted students. Pre-service teachers in WA **do not receive training in identifying gifted students** nor are they appropriately equipped to differentiate the curriculum for those who are identified. The situation is not much better around Australia. Researchers from WA have published data showing how few universities offer units in giftedness to teachers at pre-service and post graduate levels.⁴ No university in WA currently includes any training at pre-service levels despite the fact that all teachers will teach these students.

The definition used by each of the education systems in WA with regard to gifted and/or talented students is that of Francoys Gagne's as outlined in his *Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent*⁵ (Appendix 1). He highlights the difference between natural potential and that of successful performance.

Gifted students are those whose potential is distinctly above average (in the top 10%) in one or more of the following domains of human ability: intellectual, creative, social and physical.

Talented students are those whose skills are distinctly above average (in the top 10%) in one or more areas of human performance.

Giftedness then encompasses natural ability, or potential, in one or more of the intellectual, creative, social perceptual or physical domains. With the right opportunities, this natural ability or potential can develop into high-level performance, which we recognise as talent, in any area of human endeavour.

The development of potential into talent (high levels of performance) requires a systematic process of talent development. While our teachers are under-prepared to identify and nurture our most able students, they continue to fall back on the incorrect presumption that that achievement equates to ability. Other countries are now also drawing awareness to the fact that highest marks are often awarded to the most compliant rather than the most able students.⁶ By equating achievement with giftedness, many gifted students are overlooked. Gifted students do not always achieve highly and this is most often as a direct result of inappropriate opportunities to develop their potential and remain motivated learners. The premise that 'they are bright therefore they will be fine without help' is simply untrue. Gifted students have different learning needs in the same way that students with intellectual disabilities or other learning difficulties do.

⁴ Taylor, T., Milton, M. (2006) "Preparation For Teaching Gifted Students: an investigation into university courses in Australia" *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* Vol 15 (1) June 2006. This article includes a summary of units and courses available to teachers at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Australia. A less technical version of this article titled "Teacher Education in Catering for Gifted Learners" appeared in *Gifted* magazine Issue 149, 2008 published by the NSW Association for the Gifted and Talented.

⁵ Francoys Gagne's 'Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent', the recognised model use by schools in WA, shows this clearly. A copy of the DMGT can be found in Appendix 1.

⁶ "A's for Good Behaviour" article appeared in the New York Times in November 2010 www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/weekinreview/28tyre.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss

There have been two Senate Inquiries into the education of gifted children in Australia, the first in 1988 with a second following in 2001. The report of the second inquiry found that "*there has been little progress for gifted children since [the previous inquiry in] 1988*". It agreed that gifted children have special needs in the education system and noted "that for many their needs are not being met; and many suffer underachievement, boredom, frustration and psychological distress as a result" (Foreword). It went on to note that an estimated 75% of gifted students are underachieving (performing below their level of potential).⁷ Sadly, the situation has not changed very much since then and many of our gifted children continue to go through school without being identified and, as a result, their talents and capabilities remain largely undeveloped. Many do indeed suffer distress due to the educational, emotional and social deprivation as suggested by the report. In June 2012 the Victorian Parliament Education and Teaching Committee Inquiry into The Education of Gifted and Talented Students was released with recommendations in line with the previous Senate Inquiries.⁸

Over the past 6 ½ years I have worked directly with the families of more than 300 gifted children in Western Australia. The vast majority of these children are highly gifted (potential within the top 0.1%- 1% of the population). In an overwhelming number of cases parents have sought outside help to understand their child when the situation at school has become problematic for some reason. Boredom, behavioural issues and anxiety are the most common reasons. Many have sought help from (or been referred to) psychologists and the child's intellectual ability has subsequently been assessed prior to them seeking my assistance.

With teachers untrained in identifying gifted children (as distinct from high achieving 'bright' students) many gifted children remain unaware of why they feel different to age peers, why they find it difficult to connect socially with other of the same age and why they are not engaged by the curriculum offered. They do not have a strong sense of their own potential (in fact many gifted children identify themselves by what they are **not** good at⁹) and any sense of their own potential should not be mistaken with an inflated sense of worth. Giftedness is not being 'better than' another, it is being 'better *at*' some things than most people.¹⁰

Research has demonstrated how strongly teacher expectations impact on student achievement. If a teacher with a gifted child in their class remains oblivious to the fact (as a result of the child not performing at a high level which signals to an untrained eye a child of high ability), or remains focussed on behavioural issues which may be present in the classroom, they will not be expecting

⁷ Submissions made to, and the recommendations of the Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children can be found in *The Education of Gifted Children*. Collins, J. (Chair). 2001 Canberra Commonwealth of Australia.

⁸ The Victorian Education and Teaching Committee 'Inquiry into The Education of Gifted and Talented Students' was released in June 2012 and is available from the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC) website www.vagtc.asn.au

⁹ Dr Dan Peters PhD, psychologist specializing in gifted youth and their families in the USA made this point at the 2012 SENG (Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted) National Summit in July 2012.

¹⁰ Delisle, J. (2002) *Barefoot Irreverance* Prufrock Press, Waco TX. p31

high achievement from the student, nor will they set up the opportunity for the child to develop their potential and achieve at a high level. The importance of quality education was reinforced by Prof Jonathon Carapetis, who took over as Director of Perth's Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in July 2012. He is quoted as saying there is compelling evidence to show that children who missed out on access to good health and education early in life faced major setbacks.¹¹ Quality education and health care meets the needs of the individual child, rather than simply the blanket needs of most children.

Lower quality teachers, untrained to recognise or accommodate gifted students hinder the achievement of the goal of equity and excellence outlined in *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People*. When equity is interpreted as everyone having the same opportunities, or equality of outcome (demonstrated by everyone achieving at the same level), rather than **equity of opportunity to develop their potential** to the fullest via access to curriculum at the appropriate level or pacing, our most able students do not experience equity. They are in fact **disadvantaged**, and potential is not developed into talent.

We are underselling ourselves. Our most precious natural resource languishes in our classrooms as a result of teaching being available as a 'last resort' tertiary option to those unable to be accepted into other courses, coupled with inadequate preparation to nurture the potential that lies in our classrooms. Not only does this short-change individuals, it short changes us as a state and nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. •Raise the minimum level of students accepted into teaching such that it is no longer considered a 'last resort' course by many
2. Include awareness of giftedness, identification and differentiation of the curriculum in pre-senior teacher education courses.
3. Seek corporate education partnerships with industries which rely on gifted and talented individuals (including mining) in order to encourage gifted individuals into teaching perhaps via scholarships or HELP fee sponsorship;

¹¹ Prof Jonathan Carapetis as quoted at <http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/breaking/14346334/children-need-a-bright-start/> 24 July 2012

PROBLEM 2 -- TRAINING OF PSYCHOLOGISTS

Giftedness is not a component of pre-service training for psychologists, including those who work in schools.

RELATED TERM OF REFERENCE

Factors influencing positive or negative childhood development from birth to Year 12.

ISSUES ARISING

Where issues arise in the education of a child, parents frequently advocate for interventions appropriate to their child's needs in the school setting. In many instances the School Principal will seek and rely on the advice of the School Psychologist in managing a gifted child, particularly where acceleration (shown by decades of research to be a vastly underutilised but highly effective strategy for many gifted students) is being considered.

However, giftedness is not a component of training for psychologists, including school psychologists, in any state in Australia at the present time. Content of courses offered is prescribed by the Australian Psychologist Accreditation Council (APAC) who do not make it a requirement. Some psychologists and school psychologists choose an elective unit in Special Needs which may briefly mention giftedness. No units currently focus on giftedness in WA.¹²

Parents of gifted children are likely then to find they are the most knowledgeable party in discussions at school, as giftedness does not form a component of teacher training either. The lack of knowledge of school administrators was noted in the recent Victorian Inquiry into The Education of Gifted and Talented Students.¹³ Parents of gifted children are often widely read and well informed by necessity, but many report that their knowledge is discounted in favour of an (untrained) professional.¹⁴

A psychologist who is unfamiliar with characteristics of gifted children or the intensity and sensitivity common to this group of students can easily misinterpret what they see and hear. The risk of misdiagnosis (gifted behaviour diagnosed as a pathology) is high when behaviours are interpreted in light of the 'normal' population. A child's intensity, impatience, sensitivity and high energy, all characteristics common amongst gifted children, may be mistaken for AD/HD. A sensitive, intense and strong-willed child's behaviour might be mistaken for Oppositional Defiant Disorder, particularly if they do not like to be criticized for thinking differently and tend to question rules or engage in power struggles with those in authority. The impact of inconsistencies

¹² See Note 4 above

¹³ See Note 9 above

¹⁴ Parents' experience as reported during consultations with *Thinking Ahead*

or injustices they observe in the world, or their lack of opportunity to interact with like minds might be considered to be signs of a mood disorder in another. Gifted individuals often experience intense feelings or changes of mood and depression can have its roots in unrecognized giftedness.

The school psychologist may recommend interventions to correct behavioural issues without an awareness of the need for modification of the educational (or social) opportunities for the gifted child, nor with deference to the child's exceptional reasoning ability which often renders typical behaviour management methods ineffective in an extremely short space of time. Behaviour, which may have resulted from inadequate learning opportunities may be approached as the 'problem' with other interventions withheld until behaviour improves.¹⁵ It is highly unlikely that teachers or psychologists would consider it appropriate to withhold learning support opportunities for a child of low intellectual ability based on their behaviour, yet parents report this approach for gifted children.

The problem does not lie simply with school psychologists and those in private practice, although this is where parents most often find it problematic. Other medical and allied health professionals also remain uninformed about giftedness and how it impacts on a child's development, sometimes with dire results.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

¹⁵ All these examples are drawn from clients who have consulted with me regarding their gifted child and who were seeking information, advocacy support and assistance with education planning between 2006 and 2011.

¹⁶ *Thinking Ahead* consultation case files, January 2010 and ongoing.

[REDACTED]

While this is an extreme example, it is by no means an isolated one. I have consulted to families of three other children who have expressed suicide ideation before 8 years of age (this is approximately 1% of my case load to date). In each case the family had eventually found a psychologist with knowledge of giftedness (prior to seeing me), but none found help within the school setting. None of these children were found to be 'mentally ill', they were highly gifted.

Decisions made without awareness of the needs of this population can have long term effects on health, education and life satisfaction just as they do with other special needs populations.

The goal of education should be to maximize progress in life. This requires appropriate opportunities. Without training teachers, and particularly school psychologists, (given the weight that is placed on their opinion in school based decision making) may stand in the way of appropriate opportunities. The personal, local and national impact should not be underestimated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- .. That training in giftedness becomes a pre-requisite for employment as a School Psychologist.
- 2. Principals (and decision makers) acknowledge their own lack of knowledge, and that of their staff, and have the means to seek the opinion of specialist professionals for special needs populations.

PROBLEM 3– LIMITED PROGRAMS FOR ACADEMICALLY TALENTED STUDENTS

- Inadequate funding provided for academic talent programs, resulting in insufficient places for gifted students.
- Academic talent programs begin too late

RELATED TERM OF REFERENCE

Factors influencing positive or negative childhood development from birth to Year 12.

ISSUES ARISING

Giftedness is a life long trait, not something that develops at an arbitrary or pre-determined point in time, coinciding with PEAC or GATE selection testing in government schools (or program selection when available in other systems). This section of my submission focuses on intellectual giftedness and the programs available for gifted and academically excellent students in WA.

As already outlined teachers do not receive training in recognizing or providing for gifted children as part of their training, despite the presence of gifted children in virtually every classroom. As a result gifted students in government schools must survive a system which does not recognise or provide adequately for their needs for long enough to be selected for a place in a program designed for academically able students.

As noted earlier the definition used by each of the education systems in WA is that of Prof Francois Gagne's *Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent* in which he highlights the difference between natural potential and that of successful performance and identifies giftedness as the top 10% of the population in terms of potential.

Achievement is not an adequate identifier of giftedness. While high achieving students may be mildly or perhaps moderately gifted, as many as 75% of our intellectually gifted students underachieve (perform below their potential), as reported in the second of two Senate inquiries into the Education of Gifted Children.¹⁷

While our teachers are under-prepared to identify and nurture our most able students, many continue to believe, incorrectly, that high achievement equates to giftedness. When selection for programs for academically able students relies on teacher nomination, they tend to select those students who achieve highly, but overlook gifted students whose performance could be equally outstanding if they had access to opportunities which were commensurate with their learning needs. Research has shown that parents are more accurate in identifying giftedness in their children than teachers without training in giftedness¹⁸ and information from parents should be sought in identifying gifted students.

¹⁷ See Note 7

¹⁸ Prof Miraca Gross noted that parents more often identify g children more accurately than teachers without training in *Gifted Students in Primary School: Differentiating the curriculum* by Gross, McLeod, Drummond and Merrick 2001. Dr Louise Porter also

How many gifted children are there in our schools?

Based on data collected in the 2011 census, there are 363,718 children attending school in WA. Of these 236,387 children (65%) attend Government schools, the remaining 127,331 (35%) are spread across Independent and Catholic schools.

Using Gagne's *Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent* which identifies 10% of the population as within the gifted range, there are 36,371 gifted students in our schools, of which 23,638 attend Government schools

How many have access to programs?

Access to programs for academically able students in government schools depends on a student's results in a single test administered on one day. To score within the top students on this single group test and secure a place in a selective program, gifted students must maintain their motivation and enthusiasm for learning despite the lack of access to appropriate learning opportunities for their needs.

While the test for selection into primary school programs (PEAC) is designed to measure potential rather than achievement, Australian research has demonstrated that there is a flattening effect on IQ scores that occurs where educational provision has been inadequate. This means that even though they may have been shown to be sufficiently gifted when tested at an earlier age, they may not score as highly after a number of years in the education system.¹⁹ In addition, a group administered test which utilises multiple choice answers for the most part is not as accurate in identifying children at the highest end of the range of giftedness. Not only is it more susceptible to luck (you have a chance of guessing an answer correctly) than an individual test where the child must supply an answer, many highly gifted children over think the answers, expecting that it should be difficult if it is a test of such importance. This means they may discount their first impression of the correct answer because it appears '*too obvious*'. Creative thinkers amongst the gifted population may see several of the answers as '*plausible*' in their mind. If they chose the '*most interesting*' (again anticipating this is what is required in an important test), they are less likely to choose a conventional and correct answer.

Parents have reported that the Department of Education has indicated that there are approximately 2000 places in the PEAC (Primary Extension And Challenge) programs in government schools in WA. When you add in the places in Selective High Schools and Specialist programs in High Schools (approximately 700 for each of Year 8, 9 and 10), there are approximately 4,100 places for gifted students where they are grouped with like ability peers. This amounts to appropriate opportunities for just 17% of our gifted students attending government

reports on research by others about the accuracy of parents in identifying giftedness in their child in *The Twelve Myths of Gifted Education* article which can be found at www.louiseporter.com.au/pdfs/twelve_myths_of_gifted_education_web.pdf

¹⁹ Fiona Smith, a psychologist specializing in the assessment and counseling of gifted children presented her preliminary findings from the analysis of 800 Stanford Binet 5 assessments with mildly to exceptionally gifted individuals at the *Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented National Conference* in Hobart in 2008. Her slides from this presentation titled ((Assessing Gifted Children: 10 years experience using the Stanford Binet 5" can be downloaded from www.aaegt.net.au/Conference2008/PowerPoints/Smith.pdf

schools.²⁰ While the Department of education policy indicates that students will be catered for in class, the lack of training teachers receive means this is extremely unlikely to be adequate for the remaining 83% of gifted students who have to rely on this solely as they are unable to access other programs.

If a situation such as this existed in the area of health, there would be swift action to address the imbalance.

Grouping gifted students together is a strategy supported by almost every recognised authority on the education and emotional development of gifted children. Prof Karen Rogers who is highly regarded in the field of gifted education recommends that 'students who are intellectually gifted and talented should spend the majority of their school day with others of similar abilities and interests.'²¹

The current selection process in the government school system identifies high achieving students (as the program literature claims) but the majority of gifted students are underachieving (many significantly) by the time selection testing comes around. Lack of identification and appropriate provision means they do not maintain a passion for learning. Many are disillusioned and disengaged. Some teaching practices (grouping by age, group work, and significant amounts of repetition regardless of whether a concept is mastered) undermine performance over time. This means that the selection process for programs for WA's top students actually misses many of the most gifted students.

Put simply academically selective programs, as limited as they are, begin too late. We need early identification programs utilising a range of identification tools, teachers skilled in differentiation, and a willingness for students to progress through the curriculum as needed. These students need the opportunity to develop and demonstrate their potential, just as every child does.

Too few places

Funding to Education Regions for Academic talent programs in Government Primary Schools is based on the population of the region, rather than on the population of identified gifted students within a district. While all Education Regions in WA use the same selection test which students in government schools sit in Year 4, the cut off score for selection varies from region to region depending on the number of gifted students identified by the testing. While some regions place all students who meet the Department of Education criteria (top 2.5%), others 'run out' of places before all identified students are placed. Further, some regions rely solely on the selection test and will not consider teacher or parent nomination of students; those who move into the system

²⁰ Provision in independent and Catholic schools varies hugely with no policy requirements to identify or provide adequately for these students. There is no reason to expect they are better catered for in Independent or Catholic schools.

²¹ Prof Rogers comment appears in Miraca Gross' 1994 Eminent Australian Address Responding to the Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted Children. The paper was first published in 1994 in *The Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*, Volume 3, Number 2. Prof Rogers reviewed 314 research studies into acceleration and her work was published in 1991 as 'A best-evidence synthesis of research on acceleration options for gifted students'. In this article she lays to rest misconceptions that acceleration is only grade skipping and that acceleration 'produces negative social and emotional consequences' for gifted learners. In 1999 she updated her earlier synthesis which can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/7tp2wa7>

(from interstate or by change of school) who may not have had the opportunity to sit the test in Year 4; nor the results of independently administered IQ testing which identifies the child as gifted, despite an individual test being recognised as a more accurate measure of potential. Other regions recognise the limitations of a single test on one day and accept students who meet the criteria by other means. This is clearly inequitable. The child does not stop needing a service just because they had the misfortune to relocate, or 'funds have run out'. The number of gifted students is not determined by the number of places, but by their level of potential.

In some districts, Junior PEAC programs are offered but this is not a consistent practice across educational regions and one that appears, once again, tied to funding per region.

This means a gifted child may or may not be able to access a place in a program for the academically able based on their post code.

Programs at a secondary level are even more competitively sought. Perth Modern School is currently the only fully selective academic high school in WA. Other schools run academic programs in conjunction with their regular intake, or alongside other selective programs in the Arts (as John Curtin College of the Arts). Selection is based on the results of a test, as for places in PEAC programs. Testing in this instance assesses both achievement and potential, also requires a gifted child to have survived a system not meeting their needs in both achievement and with their potential undampened. Competition for places is extremely high with the number of applicants rising steadily each year. This year Dr Liz Constable announced there had been a 20% increase in applicants. There was no commensurate increase in the number of places available.

In total there are approximately 700 places available for entry into various programs for talented students who sat selection tests this year (for programs beginning in 2014). Approximately 3650 students competed for these places in 2012. This is roughly 5 students for every place and up to 10 students for each place available at Perth Modern School. Put another way between 80% and 90% of applicants miss out, despite being appropriately able.

The competition for places has led to a whole new business of centres coaching students to pass the test and secure a place. Parents of gifted children whose potential (ability) has been shown to be within the top 0.1% - 1% of the population (by individual IQ testing) feel justifiably dissatisfied with a system that discounts or ignores this information in favour of the results of a single test which is offered on one day and one where many students have been coached heavily to secure places. Those students from less privileged backgrounds who have not had the option of similar coaching are further disadvantaged.

Had the children had appropriately challenging curriculum during their earlier school years and the opportunity to work with like minds (as less able students have been able to do, there being more of them at the lower levels of giftedness which might be called 'bright' in common language), the chances of our most able students gaining a place in an academic program would be higher.

While Independent, Private and Catholic schools do offer some programs, decisions to run or continue these are locally based and programs often come and go as staff change schools or priorities change. At this point in time there is no requirement to identify or cater for these students, and no funding available to schools who wish to do so.

Utilising online opportunities

The proliferation of online learning opportunities which now allow students to access individualised programs and allow like minds to work together despite being separated physically makes opportunities much easier to access. It no longer requires schools or education systems to develop their own programs (although they could continue to do so). Students can access other students as a part of a global community in addition to their local one, tap into resources developed by experts worldwide, learn at their own pace. They can also build cultural understandings and sensitivity in a way that would not be possible in a classroom or single school. They can also learn to manage their own learning, question, problem solve, work at their own pace – all skills which will prepare them for the world of the future in a way that the current school setting does not. While there opportunities will be of benefit to all students, they offer particular benefits to gifted students who are fewer in number and whose needs are largely unmet in the current situation. It also allows isolated students and those in an education setting without like minds and intellectual peers to feel part of a community, to socialise effectively and to make effective use of the technological resources available. Cost is low and

While there are many models available from the USA, New Zealand has also established some excellent Online Learning opportunities which allow students in both metropolitan and rural areas to work together. Of particular note is GO (Gifted Online), the interactive version of their One Day School program which has been operating since 2002.²²

Educational outcomes for gifted students are compromised when they do not have adequate opportunity to develop their potential. This requires different opportunities than are needed for average ability children. The promotion of equity and excellence as priorities are enshrined in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People* formulated in 2008, yet gifted children do not experience this equity. They are not the only ones who lose in the longer term. Our gifted young people are our most precious natural resource but one which we do not prioritise despite the value to our communities and nation.

In addition to the negative educational outcomes, lack of opportunity to work with like minds has a negative affect on the social development of our gifted young people. In order to continue to develop social skills they need the opportunity to interact with others who are at a similar stage of development socially. They are unable to learn skills from those who do not yet demonstrate them. The perception that gifted children have poor social skills is unfounded. Research by Australian Dr Louise Porter has found that the social and emotional development of this group actually proceeds better than average ability learners-they are *at least as able socially*.²³

Identify earlier

Various screening programs are in place in schools already in the early years. Many schools use the PIPS program. Parents report that although their child may score highly, this information does not appear to be utilised in planning appropriately for the most able students in the class. Rather they

²² Gifted Online also known as GO in New Zealand offers interactive online programs for gifted students across the country. For more information see their website www.georgeparkycentre.org/giftedonline.html

²³ Dr Louise Porter cites research by a list of other academics whose work has concluded that gifted children's social and emotional development actually proceeds better than average learners' on p7 of her article *The Twelve Myths of Gifted Education* which can be found on her website http://louiseporier.eom.au/pdfs/twelve_myths_of_gifted_education_web.pdf

are simply considered 'not at risk' (of falling behind) so no intervention is put in place to ensure they continue to learn by being exposed to new material and new opportunities. While those students who are falling behind at this early stage most definitely deserve intervention to ensure they have the best possible start to their education, those who are already demonstrating skills or achievement at a level beyond the usual for their age are also '*at risk*' (of not developing their potential) and should be monitored and have access to appropriate learning opportunities. It is morally wrong to hold back one child in order that another appears to make progress.

Better use could be made of information gathered by teachers, particularly those with some training in identifying and providing appropriately for gifted students, so that **all** children have the opportunity to develop their potential as fully as possible. Identification must be ongoing. Students do not all blossom at the same age or stage, the environment they find themselves in both at home and at school plays a part.

In order for our gifted students to develop and contribute positively both in their personal lives and within the community, recognition of this group of students with special (different) needs is essential. With an Inclusive model of education being currently favoured, teachers need to be able to provide appropriately for gifted students in the classroom. Many structures (flexible pacing in particular) would ease the burden on teachers who, without training, are expected to cater for students whose ability and skill development can vary by as much as 6 or 7 year levels in a single class by the end of Primary school.

Additional funding is needed to ensure that educators are appropriately trained to recognise and educate this population; more places are needed **beginning in early childhood**, and continuing right throughout the years of education in order that gifted children can access programs designed to meet their learning needs, either designed for gifted students to work together face to face or remotely. This is essential to provide this group of students with an education that meets their needs, something to which **every** child is entitled.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase funding for programs so all gifted children have the opportunity to access places and work with like minds for the majority of their time.
2. Begin identifying gifted students from an early age and continue to do so at regular points throughout the education process. Make provisions to work with like ability students in various configurations available at all levels for those identified.
3. Utilise e.g. learning opportunities for students of all ages in addition to face to face, to bring students together.
4. Ensure all teachers have training in identifying and differentiating for gifted students.

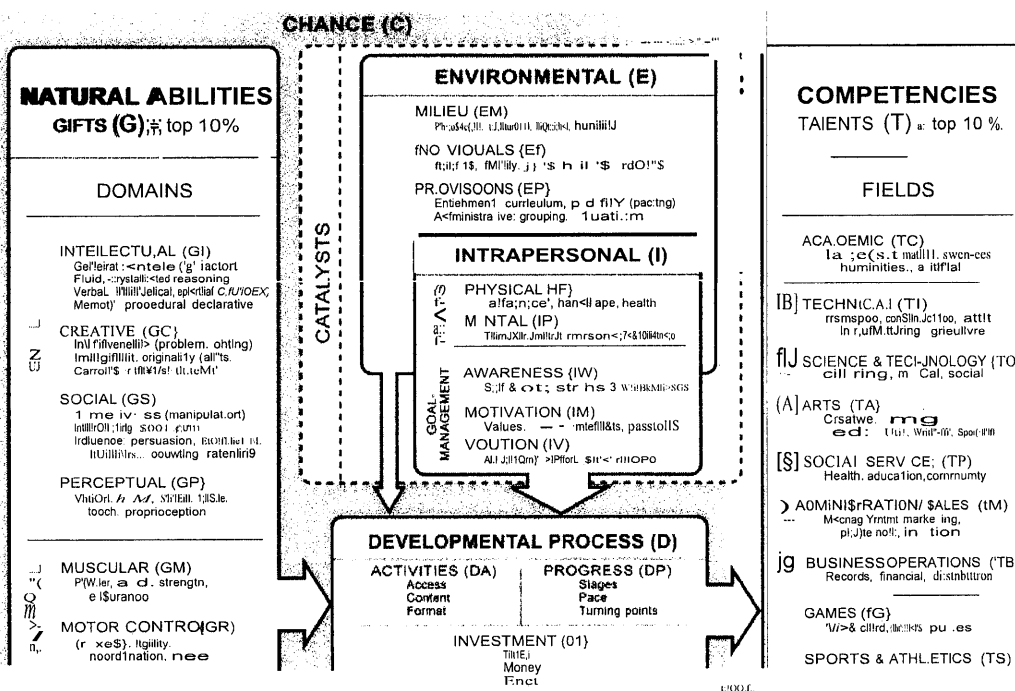
CONCLUSION

A significant factor affecting the positive development of gifted children in the years from birth to year 12 is the lack of recognition or provision for the learning and socialisation needs of this group of our population. At 10% of our student population they comprise a significant number of students. It is not only their individual futures which are adversely affected by the lack of appropriate opportunity, our local, state and national communities are also affected. For Australia to take its place in the global economy, the recognition and nurturing of this great natural resource is extremely important. Apart from the direct benefits to the community, the savings on mental services health alone are significant. The return on an investment in our gifted young people is high.

Mandating the identification of these students and providing appropriately for their development, drawing on research based models and best practice information currently available internationally (and in Australia where available – without a focus on these students the local research is limited).

Professionals, both in education and in health and allied services need to be adequately trained and teachers in particular need to be adequately prepared to provide the differentiated curriculum that is needed for these students.

Appendix 1 - Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent 2.0 (released May 2005)



Source: from attachment to personal communication with Prof Francois Gagne. This table can also be found in the Department of Education Guidelines that accompany the 2011 Gifted and Talented Policy