

Gifted Education

By Lauren Djakovac

What is Gifted Education?

Gifted education has become multifaceted. Although educators are generally concerned with academic giftedness, different communities view giftedness in other ways, reflecting their cultural values. A simple way to identify giftedness in students is to look for those who have abilities in one or more learning areas that are in advance of their same age peers.

Key issues

Many gifted children are not successfully catered for in South Australia. According to Mrs Wendy Stewart, President of the Gifted and Talented Children's Association of SA, "It is quite clear that many educators in positions of authority seem to feel that it is not necessary to make special provisions for gifted students in their school and that many class teachers do not know what to do with gifted children in their class". She believes teachers need compulsory study on dealing with gifted students as part of their basic training.

Giftedness is developmental. While some gifted students who are highly motivated may achieve at extremely high levels, giftedness does not guarantee academic success. There are also gifted underachievers. Mrs Lesley Henderson, Lecturer and Course Co-ordinator in Gifted Education at Flinders University says "If educational provisions lack the necessary challenge and affective support that gifted learners need to excel, then these students will be 'switched off' learning, will fail to achieve, and may even drop out of school because they are bored, frustrated and disengaged".

Gifted Education programs for teachers

Mrs Stewart states teacher professional development is needed to improve the situation for both gifted children and their parents - but this requires allocations of funds. She says "There is very little support for long term professional development for teachers who wish to learn more about educating gifted students - either in terms of providing time or financial support".

Only a few universities across the country include a compulsory unit of gifted education in an undergraduate teaching degree, while post-graduate courses are expensive and demanding on a teacher's time. In South Australia, Flinders University offers Gifted Education as a postgraduate qualification and The University of South Australia incorporates it in an undergraduate fourth year unit on children with special needs. However, commencing in 2011, Mrs Henderson reveals Flinders University is restructuring its education degrees - which will include a semester topic specifically on differentiating curriculum and instruction for diverse learners.

How can parents help their gifted children?

Parents of gifted children are often concerned by unsupportive teachers and frustrated by the lack of provision for their children. The Gifted and Talented Children's Association of SA runs special classes for gifted students four times each school term. Mrs Stewart says "their aim is to provide intellectually rigorous

activities which are outside of the normal school curriculum". To attend these classes, the association requires documentation from the child's teacher stating that the child is academically two or more years ahead in one or more areas of learning.

Mrs Stewart also advises parents they simply need to be aware of where their child's interests are and support their development. She feels "The broader the range of experiences the parents can provide for the child the better, and the more books the parents and child read together the better".

Possible solutions for gifted children

According to Mrs Stewart, often if a gifted child is attending a mainstream school very little is changed in regards to their curriculum or workload. She suggests two possible options:


- *Acceleration* - It has been proven by research to be one of the best possible options for academically advanced students, however educators in positions of power continue to have doubts about the efficacy of this strategy.
- *Curriculum Compacting* - If teachers were to pre-test the level of student knowledge in all students (for every topic before it was taught), they would then have some idea about the residual knowledge of this topic that every student has - and could make appropriate decisions about the learning experiences of each child.

What needs to be changed?

To achieve more consistent and equitable educational provisions, it's been recommended by some experts that:

- Gifted Education needs to be advocated within the government and influencing policy development and resource allocation at the highest level.

"if educational provisions lack the necessary challenge and affective support that gifted learners need to excel, then these students will be 'switched off' learning"



“Teacher professional development is needed to improve the situation for both gifted children and their parents - but this requires allocations of funds”

- School leaders must ensure that Gifted Education is resourced within their schools and support their staff in professional development in this area.
- Teachers need to apply differentiated curriculum and instruction in learning environments which embrace diverse students' needs.

For more information on Gifted Education visit: <http://www.gtcasa.asn.au/site/> ■