

Submission to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs Inquiry into the Educational Achievement Gap in the ACT.

The ACT Gifted and Talented Support Group provides support for gifted children and their families by organising activities, guest speakers, family days, and general information and guides to other resources.

Who are gifted?

Often within the ACT, students who are gifted are misnamed as bright, or very bright students.

Children of high potential, often referred to as gifted, are children who have the potential to perform at significantly higher levels than those of their same age, well above the average. These are children, who have an untrained natural ability or advanced development in one or more areas, which may include the intellectual, creative, physical, and social-emotional. Further, these children are found in all parts of our society, regardless of socio-economic background and culture.

Gagne's research amongst others tells us that around 20% of the population, that is, 4-8 students in a class of 30 may be gifted.

What do you mean by Gifted?

These are children who have learning characteristics which are significantly different from those of the majority of their classmates, and like developmentally disabled children, parents and teachers need to respond to these needs.

Issues relating to the achievement gap in the ACT and the decline in high-end results.

The 2000 and 2008 achievement gap studies show that the bottom end of the scale hasn't changed, that there was not an overall decline in educational outcomes. It is the top end of the scale, which is moving backwards. Some of the reasons within this complex and multi-faceted issue can be attributed to the lack of educational options in the ACT for gifted students.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many families with children of high potential simply leave town for established programs interstate. For those who educate their gifted children in the ACT much of their education has been negotiated through individual teachers rather than as a result of whole school sets of strategies and programs. This is problematic at best.

Gifted Underachievement

Underachieving, may in relation to giftedness, be defined as someone who has shown exceptional performance on a measure of intelligence and who, nevertheless, does not perform as well as expected for students of the same age on school-related tasks. It is however, a learned behaviour, which can be prevented, or unlearned with appropriate strategies in place.

	A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE
SUBMISSION NUMBER	08
DATE AUTH'D FOR PUBLICATION	27 Oct 2009

Identification of Gifted students in the ACT

In guidelines to aid identifying gifted children, there are six personality types outlined by Betts and Neillhart. It is disturbing that 90% of identified students in school programs are Type 1's, or those who are successful in the early years. Identification, for those untrained, may be difficult if children are protectively hiding (they want to be accepted, or fit in), underachieving, or it masked by difficulties using a second language, cultural difference, or a disability. These students are often the invisible underachievers.

Often those who are identified are the successful, motivated ones who are achieving and have successes. These are the students who have demonstrated levels of high performance. These Type 1's however often become bored, get by doing as little as possible and in many cases fail to learn needed skills for autonomy and later underachieve.

High Potential all too often does not result in demonstrated high performance in our schools. As both research and anecdotal evidence demonstrate, many gifted students remain unidentified, and are frustrated in their learning needs. Where identification has occurred there is more and more anecdotal evidence in the ACT that teachers are seeing gifted students where potential is not being developed. This will have a marked effect on the Achievement result.

Resourcing

It is equally disturbing that a large proportion of students identified come from the higher socio-economic families suggesting that lack of access to equal resources also plays a substantial role in identification of high potential. This is the only group of students whose families have to pay to gain entry into an ACT government school program. The ACT Gifted and Talented Support Group commend the Labour Party in its 2009-10 Budget for allocating resources through DET towards providing free identification for early entry into Preschool and Kindergarten for these students.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding in the community around "Gifted". There is a common belief that Gifted students do not need special help as they will succeed anyway. This is contradicted by many studies of underachievement. Many children of high potential are not challenged, are not provided with a learning environment which meets their needs, and therefore do not "learn how to learn", often becoming unmotivated, frustrated and disillusioned. Research has also demonstrated that programs for gifted students should be designed using higher order thinking skills, not repetition or more of the same. These children are not being made to learn faster, but are instead progressing closer to their naturally preferred rate of learning.

School culture may also play a part in promoting underachievement, by predominately using performance based assessment with emphasis on the outcome. Many Gifted children have heightened emotional sensitivities, this amongst other issues of perfectionism and boredom can lead to reduced risk taking and the willingness to try, and perhaps fail. Children who learn to see themselves as failures begin to place self imposed limits on what is possible. More focus is required on behaviour, feelings, and needs, rather than intellectual abilities, talents or interests of gifted children.

Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gap

- Supports the recommendations of the Senate paper 2001, and DET policy
- **Identification of Gifted students** should be made possible through parent nomination, teacher nomination, and other objective assessment.
- **Equitable and needs-based funding**, with program continuity
- Supports teaching strategies proven in research, which include a range of sustainable programs to meet a diverse range of needs, with long-term monitoring of a students educational outcomes.
- **Differentiation of Curriculum:** to match individual learning style,
- **Individual Learning Plans**
- Enrichment and Extension
- **Grouping** : The reduction in streaming in favour of mixed ability classes has resulted in a far from favourable outcome for gifted students. Vertical grouping is a preferred option
- **Acceleration** : including subject acceleration, grade skipping, early entry, concurrent enrolment where students can enrol in tertiary subjects while still at school, telescoping where two years are completed in one, and radical acceleration / or several types of acceleration for the highly gifted students.
Research shows us that the affects of supported acceleration are positive in learning outcomes and that there is usually a strong improvement in social adjustment. As Prof. Karen Rogers research shows where needs are met months of learning can often be made in a short time.
-Unlike Victoria and NSW there are no programs in ACT colleges, and while students in year 10 can on occasion do year 11 subjects, they can't count towards their UAI.
- Education towards **attitude change** is required to debunk myths, and promote understandings of Gifted children's needs.
- The ability of DET and schools to meet the needs of gifted students is constrained by the **availability of appropriately skilled teachers** and support staff. DET has an important role to manage its workforce to meet the needs of those students identified as gifted, through **adequate staff training and support, and resourcing.**
- **Addressing associated Learning disabilities**
- **MCEETYA should expand the national reporting framework** for school education to focus on not only minimum benchmarks but also high achievement targets for Gifted children
- More focus is required on behaviour, feelings, and needs, rather than intellectual abilities, talents or interests of gifted children.
- **Building an appropriate parent, teacher, student relationship.** Where there doesn't occur there are problems (PISA results)
- The provision for on-going teacher training for experienced staff and the introduction of **compulsory training for gifted education** for pre-service teachers would go along way to address this.
- Access to information for parents

These children are not always seen as being the potential movers and shaker, and problem solvers for the world. Acknowledgement that Australia's future is better served by meeting the needs of its gifted students, will ensure that they will achieve their potential. This outcome benefits all Australians as gifted people contribute positively in areas such as commerce, politics, science and medicine. Addressing Gifted under-achievement would see a marked improvement in educational outcomes within the ACT.

REFERENCES

ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Inc (P&C Council, Policy Document (2008), Section C: Equality of Education: C2. *Children With Special Talents*.

Delisle, James.R. and Berger, Sandra.L. (1990), *Underachieving Gifted Students*.
http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/underachieving_gifted.html.

GAT200808 *Gifted and Talented Students*, Education Act 2004,
http://www.det.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/policy_a-z

Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information centre (GERRIC), School of Education, University of New South Wales, *Booklet of Support Materials for Regional and Remote Workshops for Parents About Gifted Education* (2004) Writers: Professor Miraca Gross, Caroline Merrick, Ruth Taggett, Dr Graham Chaffey, Bronwyn MacLeod, Stan Bailey.

Rogers, Karen B. Ph.D., *What is Happening in the World of Gifted Education?* (2008) University of St Thomas, Minneapolis, USA.

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, *The Education of Gifted Children* (Oct 2001).