

SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION: THE RIGHTS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

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All children in Australia have a right to an education that meets their individual needs and allows them to fulfil their potential.

While much progress has been made in protecting this right within our education system for children with various disabilities, children of Indigenous backgrounds, and children who do not have English as a first language, this right continues to be largely denied for children with high abilities (i.e., gifted children).

Gifted children comprise at least 10% of all Australian children, according to the model of giftedness that is commonly adopted in Australia (Gagné, 2009). Unfortunately, the denial of their right to an appropriate education means that as much as 50% of these children are underachieving at quite substantial levels (Morisano & Shore, 2010). Many underachieving gifted children drop out of school and otherwise fail to live up to their tremendous potential.

Most teachers in Australian schools do not have training in gifted education, and therefore are not aware of who gifted children are, and what educational provisions should be provided for these children. Indeed, gifted education forms a compulsory unit in teacher training programs in only three Australian universities (UNSW, University of New England, and Wollongong University). This is due to the fact that the state/territory bodies that accredit university teacher training programs do not require them to have a compulsory unit in gifted education (so that future teachers will be in a position to adequately provide for gifted children). In the state of New South Wales, the state body requires (or is in the process of requiring) compulsory units in special education, Indigenous education, and English as an additional language/dialect, but not in gifted education.

Relatedly, many education bodies do not give any meaningful attention to gifted children. For example, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) have issued standards devoted to “Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds”, “Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students”, and “Strategies to support full participation of students with disability”, but none are specifically devoted to gifted children/students. In fact, the expressions “gifted” or “academically advanced” do not appear in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Moreover, many state/territory education departments do not have sections or personnel with specific responsibility in supporting gifted children.

A major barrier to the provision of appropriate educational and related support for gifted children appears to be the ill-informed attitude that educational provisions for these children

are inequitable and elitist. **Gifted children have a right to an appropriate education just as much as all other children in Australia.**

References

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