“The identification of gifted and talented students should be a priority of modern industrialised societies. Within these gifts one can find the future leaders, future visionary’s and innovators that a society requires from leadership, morals and ethics, economic prosperity, spiritual and social wellbeing. However, this must also not become a burden, or interfere, or be at the cost of the general education and wellbeing of students that could be considered to be of a lesser talent or intellect, or of lessor social and economic skills, or even a lessor social or economic background.”

Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students

Andrew Lockwood-Penney

Public submission

“Without Predejuce“
Andrew Lockwood-Penney.

Dedicated to the Incarnate Christ of God

“In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth “.

The Gospel according to John.
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The Philosophy of Education: Plato and others.

Throughout the History of Humankind, most civilizations and their individual societies have placed much emphasis upon education of its citizens, including slaves and non-Citizens. Without an education system, what is a society to become?

In general no society can function without an adequate education system, that not only prepares its citizens for membership as productive members of a given individual society, but for the whole, an education system is also part of a wide industrial complex that intertwines a vast community of industries and services that enable a culture's economic survival. Both within its own borders, and within its dealings, outside of its territories\(^1\).

Overall, most education systems have an adequate supply of resources and manpower, which continues to educate the young and mature, generation after generation. We could argue that most generations produce the educated Man and Women, for the roles in society, in which they feel their calling and vocation belongs.

However, if we said that the majority of the young and old\(^2\) that pass through the education system of any given society was average and this average was enough for the continuation to function of that society, and that these average participants, as educated persons, obtained a level to provide them with a means to a comfortable and affluent life, then what of a system that recognisers and nurtures higher gifted and talented students, in our case, for our study here, young gifted and talented persons.

For one thing, it is obvious that children are born illiterate and innumerate, and ignorant of the norms and cultural achievements of the community or society into which they have been thrust: but with the help of professional teachers and the dedicated amateurs in their families and immediate environs, within a few years they can read, write, calculate, and act, in culturally-appropriate ways. Some learn these skills with more facility than others, and so education also serves as a social-sorting mechanism and undoubtedly has enormous impact on the economic fate of the Individual. Put more abstractly, at its best, education equips individuals with the skills and substantive knowledge that allows them to define and to pursue their own goals, and allows them to participate in the life of their community as full-fledged, autonomous citizens\(^3\).

The identification of gifted and talented students should be a priority of modern industrialised societies. Within these gifts one can find the future leaders, future visionary’s and innovators that a society requires from leadership, morals and ethics, economic prosperity, spiritual and social wellbeing. However, this must also not become a burden, or interfere, or be at the cost of the general education and wellbeing of students that could be considered to be of a lessor talent or intellect, or of lessor social and economic skills, or even a lessor social or economic background.

Our Australian systems must endorse a complete program that is flexible to include a comprehensive evaluation of the students total academic and social skills, that includes not only the students intellect, but of the students overall personality and social skill. Moreover, of course the students best interest must always be of highest priority by both parents/carers and education professionals.

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1 See also John Dewey- *Democracy and education* (1916) in he writes “in its broadest sense education is the means of the social continuity of life”.

2 It is not a position of this research paper/submission to include within its argument exact statistics of this question. A basic working knowledge of the components and structures of a particular society can provide us with such information.

3 D. C. Phillips, “the philosophy of Education “, The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (spring 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (Ed). [http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/education-philosophy/](http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/education-philosophy/) Phillips here also provides an argument against the society’s benefit of education. It emerges that in pluralistic societies, such as the Western democracies, there are some groups that do not wholeheartedly support the development of autonomous individuals, for such folk can weaken a group from within by thinking for themselves and challenging communal norms and beliefs: from the point of view of groups whose survival is thus threatened, formal, state provided education is not necessarily a good thing.
Identifying gifted children so that particular programs can be implemented must always consider these academic and emotional needs because some gifted students may not always have the most developed social or emotional skills to fully understand the benefits, or the consequences, of being of a higher educational ability to others. If this is a special environment, or a regular environment, this must be at all times a consideration of appropriate management, and resources.

Guidance should always be centred on the normal aspects of “growing up”, in the case of younger children, and the “sensitive pressures and expectations” of becoming a young adult, in the case of teenagers.

Education in Australia, in general, is of a quality that one may say, is of a high standard for the funding it receives, and is allocated

In increasingly globalised times, common trends across different national educational systems can be identified. Australian education has historically had strong links to European or British developments, as well as to developments in the U.S. Nevertheless, there are some distinctive features of the Australian system of education such as the relationship between government and independent schools (Public/private) and the different social status, levels of government funding and relevant cultural authority of the two-school system. In the state of Victoria for example, approximately 30% of the school age population attend private schools (which includes elite and Catholic schools) and the relevant merits of either system is a frequent topic of media, public, and family discussions.

When planning or consulting policy or testing of gifted and talented students, within the primary/secondary school environment, these factors must be considered because talented and gifted students are educated within this system. There is no separate system away from the mainstream system. Therefore, their needs and education are always, in some form, part of the whole system in each state.

Sociology studies of education can present this in focus, by its reasoning and research methods and should be considered further as part of this committee inquiry.

Simply put, sociological studies of education show how educational institutions are part of the social fabric, how what happens in schools, or kindergartens, or Universities or TAFE colleges can both reflect and have consequences for social relations and social processors, and makes strong arguments about these relationships. It sees educational institutions, experiences, and outcomes as major components of social life, and as having significant impact on the material and cultural conditions that frame a person’s life chances and experiences.

Talented and gifted students, being part of this educational environment and system, are subject to its particular dynamics and its processors, just as less gifted and talented students are also subjected.

This system can be further presented as Meritocratic. Education is charged with many social responsibilities. It has responsibility’s not only for teaching literacy, numeracy, and other important skills, but also for instilling sound and desirable civic and social values that will prepare current generations to become productive future generations. Meritocratic views are linked to the political philosophy of liberalism that developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This set of ideas, which remains influential, emphasised the rights and freedoms of individuals and

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1 In saying this, it is not suggested that our individual state education systems, are in general, on a national level, outstanding. The systems are of a high standard compared to the funding it receives. (Does not include University’s).
2 John Germov & Marilyn Poole, Public Sociology: An Introduction to Australian society (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2007), 409.
3 Germov & Poole, Public Sociology: An Introduction to Australian Society, 410.
4 Sociology is a recognised social science and can provide further analyses and research into these questions and environment. It is used here to demonstrate that talented and gifted students are, and can be found, within the mainstream education system, and this has a direct influence upon policies and programs.
5 Meritocratic-An objective measurement by which to assign social positions rather than by means of ascribed positions such as social class, age, or gender.

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held that all individuals were born equal, and had opportunities to succeed. This was in contrast to then very persuasive beliefs that one’s social background, for example, whether one was born into a wealthy or poor family, or divine order could determine one’s destiny. Hard work and merit, or talent, were for the meritocratic theorists the pre-requisites for success, in schools, in work, and in life⁸.

It is widely recognised that schools are important in forming the social values of future generations. However, there is considerably less agreement of what those values should be. For some the answer is relatively straightforward—schools should reflect the values of the dominant culture, for others, even this simple statement is highly problematic. What do we identify as the “dominant culture” in Australia? Even if we identify that, we still need to consider whether and what are the shared values, and which such values should be fostered. Moreover, what of cultural pluralism? Australia is culturally and ethnically diverse, and this raises the basic question of how schools manage to respond to the values of the different communities that might make up their student population⁹.

With that said, when considering programs for gifted and talented students, one must consider the social values in which the programs are placed. Here one can argue general principles of social values and schooling, and we can consider certain contexts in which the programs are placed¹⁰.

Education in General, and philosophy of education, in light of our discussion within this inquiry, talented students or not, they are placed into a domain that is essentially the pursuit of knowledge. However, what does this pursuit of knowledge tell us about the education system that all students find themselves in.

Education as transmission of Knowledge versus education as the fostering of inquiry and reasoning skills that are conductive to the development of autonomy which roughly, is the tension between education as conservative and education as progressive, and is also closely related to differing views about human perfectibility, issues that historically have been raised in the debate over the aims of education: the question of what this knowledge, and what these skills ought to be, part of the domain of philosophy of the curriculum: the questions of how learning is possible and what it is to have learned something, two sets of issues that relate to the question of capacities and potentialities that are present at birth, and also to the process and stages of human development and to what degree this process is flexible and hence can be influenced or manipulated: the tension between liberal education and vocational education, and the overlapping issue of which should be given priority, education for personal development or education for citizenship, the differences between education and enculturation: the distinction between educating verses teaching verses training verses indoctrination: the relation between education and maintenance of the class structure of society, and the issue of whether different classes or cultural groups can justly be given education programs that differ in content or in aims; the issue of whether the rights of Children, parents, and socio-cultural or ethnic groups conflict, and if they do, the question of whose rights should be dominant; the question of to whether or not all Children have a right to state provided education, and if so, should this education reflect and respect the customs of all groups and how on earth would this be accomplished: and a set of complex issues about the relation between education and social reform, centering upon whether education is essentially conservative, or whether it can be, or the, agent of social change¹¹.

Are gifted or talented students any better to resist, or evolve, with social change, being any better than less talented or gifted students? We must be careful to fully comprehend and read all the submissions as part of this inquiry.

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⁸ Germov & Poole, Public Sociology: An Introduction to Australian Society, 417.
⁹ Germov & Poole, Public Sociology: An Introduction to Australian Society, 418.
¹⁰ Please see appendix 1.
Why? Because we must always be vigilant of submissions promoting an agenda within the education system, because this in fact leads to social change. I use here Phillips again, as reference to the philosophy of education. The point here can be also used to illustrate my previous arguments.

First there are works of advocacy produced by those non-technical, self-identified philosophers, who often have an axe to grind: they wish to destroy, or to save, common schooling, support or attack some innovation or reform (In our case issues of talented and gifted students), shore-up or destroy the capitalist mode of production (my belief is this should and must be achieved) see their own religion, or none at all, gain a foothold in the public schools, strengthen the place of the basics, in the school curriculum, and so forth.  

This applies to both negative and positive issues, discussions, and situations.

Be careful here that our programs are not looked upon, or in real terms, become indoctrination. If we separate talented students away from the less gifted students and educate them in a different style and manner, this can be considered as indoctrination. A forcing upon them of a new set of attitudes and belief systems.

The programs planned for introduction must be a balance of normal/natural modes of education. Are gifted students exposed to a different set of curriculum that entices, or instils, a different set of beliefs, ethics, or morals away from mainstream thinking?

In addition, the provocative question for me is- ‘’ do they contain high levels of philosophical and religious education especially within the secondary years of schooling ‘’.

The concept of indoctrination was also of great interest to analytic philosophers of education, for it was argued, getting clear about precisely what constitutes indoctrination also would serve to clarify the border that demarcates it from acceptable educational processors. Unfortunately, ordinary language analysis did not lead to unanimity of opinion about where this border was located, and rival analyses of the concept were put forward. Thus, whether an instructional episode was a case of indoctrination was determined by: the content that had been taught; or by the intention of the instructor, or by the methods of the instruction that had been used; or by the outcomes of the instruction; or by of course a combination of these. We never would say that students had been indoctrinated by their teacher if he or she had fostered open inquiry and discussion, encouraged exploration in the library or the internet, allowed students to work in collaborative groups, and so on. However if the teacher did not allow independent inquiry, quashed classroom questions and discussions, suppressed dissenting opinions, relied heavily on rewards and punishments, used repetition and fostered rote/habit memorization, and so on, then it is likely we would say the students were being indoctrinated.

We must be careful here to consider the curriculum that gifted and talented students, if different from any mainstream curriculum, will be exposed too. We must decide on the best curriculum for the best outcomes possible, for the student, and not the educators, government policies, or costs.

In developing a curriculum, whether in a subject area, or in the whole system, a number of difficult decisions need to be made. Issues such as the proper ordering or sequencing of topics in the chosen subjects, the time allocated to each topic, the lab work or excursions or projects that are appropriate for particular topics, can all be regarded as technical issue’s best resolved either by educationalists who have a depth of experience with the target age group or by experts in the psychology of learning and the like. However, there are deeper issues, ones concerning the validity

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of the justifications that have been given for, and including, particular subjects, or topics in the offerings of formal educational institutions\textsuperscript{14}.

One must think that other factors, previously discussed, will always have an outside impact upon any curriculum within our Australian Schools. These include social networks (especially Facebook, my Space, twitter, and internet pornography assessed by older teenage secondary School students) sporting clubs, student interests in books, internet or other related media, news, video games, or academic pursuits and interests outside of school as museums, church activities (very popular in youth groups, or teenage ministry programs) or the viewing of various documentaries of almost any topic (can I also include the group of reality shows now flooding the Pay-Tv networks on an almost never-ending range of both topics and social/career situations).

Do we now suggest that education has certain aims and functions to our society, and those constructs within, such as the capacity to give the individual being educated the social and personal autonomy, and the chance of that old age question “What is the Good Life”.

Firstly, what are the aims and/or functions of education, with aims and functions not necessarily the same, or alternatively, what constitutes the good life and human flourishing. These two formulations are related, for presumably our educational institutions should aim to equip individuals to pursue this good life. Thus for example, if our view of human flourishing includes the capacity to act rationally and/or autonomously, then the case can be made that educational institutions, and their curricula, should aim to prepare, or to help to prepare, autonomous individuals\textsuperscript{15}.

The question of the Good Life is of course beyond this submission paper, however as Phillips suggests, the Good Life, from knowledge as the result of a grounded education, can at times be thought of indoctrination.

Secondly, is it Justifiable to treat the curriculum of an educational institution as a vehicle for furthering the socio-political interests and goals of a ruler or ruling class; and relatedly, is it justifiable to design the curriculum so that it serves as a medium of control or of social engineering? In the closing decades of the twentieth century, there were numerous discussions of curriculum theory, particular from Marxist and postmodern perspectives, which offered the sobering analysis that in many educational systems, including those in Western democracies, the curriculum did indeed reflect, and serve, the interests of the ruling class\textsuperscript{16}.

\textsuperscript{14} D. C. Phillips, “the philosophy of Education”, 20. He asks the questions of Why evolution is both excluded, or included, within high school in America (Secondary school here in Australia) in the subject of Biology, or why is driver education (Not a relevant subject here in Australia) and concepts and education of birth control usually not (An issue already under debate in Australian Secondary Schools), even though sex has impact on the life of teenagers that is at least comparable to the act of driving a car. Is the justification that is given for teaching economics in some schools coherent and convincing? Does the justification for not including the holocaust or the Phenomenon of wartime atrocities in the curriculum in some countries stand up to critical scrutiny?

One debate along the lines of what Phillips is arguing here is our own nation’s debate on secular or religious education of all our National Schools, and the ongoing political and social debate of Chaplaincy programs within our schools.

\textsuperscript{15} D. C. Phillips, “the philosophy of Education”, 20. Phillips here also suggests an argument put forward by Paul Hirst.


Here Hirst argues that Knowledge is essential for developing a conception of the good life, and then for pursuing it: and because logical analysis shows, he argues, that there are seven basic forms of knowledge, and the case can be made that the function of the curriculum is to introduce students to each of these forms.

\textsuperscript{16} D. C. Phillips, “the philosophy of Education”, 20. Here Phillips extends his argument to include a quote from Apple.


“ The knowledge that now gets into schools is already a choice from a much larger universe of possible social knowledge and principles. It is a form of Cultural capital that comes from somewhere, that often reflects the perspectives and beliefs of powerful segments of our social collectivity.In its very production and dissemination as a public and economic commodity, as books, films, materials, and so forth, it is repeatedly filtered through ideological and economic commitments. Social and economic values, hence, are already embedded in the design of the institutions we work in, in the formal corpus of social knowledge, we preserve in our curricula ”.
This takes us back to a previous point on what we do with the curriculum for gifted and talented students, are we to offer a separate program to the mainstream, in our Australian Schools, and does it adjust for students of various degrees of both abilities and prior knowledge.

Thirdly, should educational programs at the elementary (Australian Primary School) and secondary levels be made up off desperate offerings, so that individuals with different interests and abilities and affinities for learning can pursue curricula that are suitable? Alternatively, should every student pursue the same curriculum as far as each is able? Curriculum, it should be noted, that in past cases nearly always was based on the needs or interests of those students who were academically inclined or were destined for elite social roles. The best education for the best is the best education for all.

Many masters of philosophy have wrestled with the questions of education in general and they are used here within this chapter to highlight the questions and debate of education for gifted and talented students.

- **PLATO** - His educational scheme was guided, presumably, by the understanding he thought he had achieved of the transcendental realm of fixed forms. John Dewey critic of positions that were not naturalistic noted that Plato’s starting point is that the organization of society depends ultimately upon knowledge of the end of existence. If we do not know its end, we shall be at the mercy of accident and caprice. And only those who have rightly trained minds will be able to recognize the end, and the ordering principle of things. He continues by saying that Plato had no perception of the uniqueness of individuals, they fall by nature into classes, in addition, Plato tended to talk of learning using the passive language of seeing, which has shaped our discourse down to the present.

- **For Dewey** each individual was an organism situated in a biological and social environment in which problems were constantly emerging, forcing the individual to reflect and act, and then learn. Knowledge arises from reflection upon our actions, and regarding knowing as an active, not a passive affair. Each student is an individual who blazes his or her unique trail of growth; the teacher has the task of guiding and facilitating this growth, without imposing a fixed end upon the process. Over the course of human development and enormous stock of Knowledge and skills has accumulated and the teacher has the task of helping the student acquire this knowledge. Critical questions include (which is important for our discussion in relation to talented and gifted students) Does growth imply a direction? Is growth always good, can’t a plant become misshapen; can’t a child develop to become bad? Isn’t possible for a student to end up without enough knowledge and skills to be able to make a living in the modern world?

- **Rousseau** - Held that contemporary Humankind has been misshapen by education; the crushing force of social conventions has stifled the nature within.

- **John Locke** - His ideas are what we call constructivism. Each student in a classroom constructs his or her own individual body of understanding, even when all are given the same stimulus or educational experience and that none of us, even teachers, can directly access the bodies of understanding of anyone else; each of us are imprisoned in the world of our own making.

In defence of Plato one must understand that his inquiries, most notably the republic is essentially an inquiry into morality and the living of the good life, by living actively within the ideal community, where morals and ethics is lived within an even balance of wisdom, courage, and restraint, with every aspect of this life working together to create harmonious Human Beings.

Each country all over the world, whether it be democratic, communist, third world, or part of a dictatorship, including us here in Australia, have their own cultural traditions and institutions of education. Therefore, we as a nation must be careful that we adapt curriculum that aligns with this

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18 Taken from Phillips pages 22-29.
cultural ethos, within our ever-widening multicultural society. We must also, as discussed, consider the social environment of the student, and the educational environment in which the student is placed such as the secular public and private school system or the non-secular such as private Catholic or Anglican schools.

Media release questions.

“Giftedness and talent may take various forms, and is not just limited to academic achievements. Students may be gifted in areas relating to art, music, sport, or interpersonal skills,” said the Committee’s Chair, Mr David Southwick MP.

This needs to be a consideration when considering programs, especially programs out of class time, or complimented to class time with an emphasis, as this submission discusses, on the social values generated from other environments that a gifted or talented student may find themselves in, such as art, music, or sport, or the development of such programs for stand-alone students who show talent in areas other than academic.

“Most programs operate on a school-by-school basis, with minimal coordination across Victoria. A priority for the Committee is to ensure that all Victorian children are being helped to realise their potential.”

This can only come about by the organization and presentation of a national federal program for gifted and talented students, thus is both flexible for each state, and for each individual student in their unique cultural, social and economic environment.

“As part of this, the Committee will explore the issue of underperformance among gifted and talented students, and whether teachers are adequately trained and supported to identify these students in their classrooms,” Mr David Southwick stated.

This is a situation in which one must consider the curriculum strategy and delivery for gifted and talented students with benchmarks and set goals/outcomes, and the consideration of who the educators are who are delivering the curriculum. Are they experienced in this type of education, is there a need for extra qualifications or certification for a new, or separate, curriculum for gifted and talented students.

The Committee will also look into negative attitudes and misconceptions surrounding giftedness and talent, as well as opportunities to enhance support to gifted and talented students, their parents and carers, teachers and school leaders”, Mr Southwick stated.

Negative attitudes are a result of any educational community displaying a preference for talented and gifted students over the less talented and gifted students. Less talented and gifted students deserve no less, no more than talented and gifted students and negative attitudes can result by this divide, or should I say, an open encouragement of such a divide.
Bibliography


