Submission to the Parliament of Victoria

Education and Training Committee

Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students

Submitted May 2011 by:

Mrs Deborah DeBuhr
BSc, MA(Teaching), PostGradDipEd(Gifted Education)
INTRODUCTION

My interest in and passion for the education of gifted students has been influenced over the years by my educational, family and work experiences.

- As a trained teacher with over 15 years in public and private primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions both in Australia and the United States. I have seen the need for specialized educational programmes, opportunities, and support for gifted students. I have also experienced both the ignorance of teachers and administrators in many schools as well as the good intentions, but lack of effectiveness, of others who have not had training or experience in gifted education.

- As a parent of two gifted visual-spatial children. Unfortunately, there is still a stigma associated with the term 'gifted' and a political correctness that parents feel they often have to abide by. In many cases, this makes it difficult to work with the school and the teachers to best meet the unique needs of gifted students. Some teachers are unable to know how to best help the gifted students. There are times when parent/teachers discussions are met with resistance and defensiveness by the teacher who feels that the parent is criticizing the educational and teaching efforts of the teacher. This experience has been that of many parents that I have come across and is not unique to my family.

- As a Gifted Educational consultant in the Ballarat area. Efforts to introduce gifted programme offerings to students in the primary schools were either met with resistance, negativity, or neutrality. Comments from principals included:
  - “We already offer something to our gifted students” (yet further investigation revealed that this ‘something’ was not a gifted programme, but electives open to all students),
  - “We don’t have any gifted students at our school” (!!)
  - “Our budget will not stretch to cover any new programmes” (even though this programme being offered was a weekly pull-out programme paid by the parents of the participating gifted students)

- As the holder of a gifted education degree. The value of gifted education training is clear, yet there are very few opportunities for and/or a low uptake of training in gifted education by pre-service and classroom teachers. This point will be explored further in Part 2 of this submission.

This submission will begin by briefly addressing the specific questions to be considered by the Education and Training Committee, in the context of Regional Victoria (Ballarat and Grampians Region).

Part 2 will give more detail through a review of current research literature and include comments on the findings.

Part 3 will conclude this submission by offering suggestions for consideration by the Committee to improve the educational opportunities for gifted and talented students and the training of their teachers.
PART 1 – Brief responses to Enquiry Questions

Responses to the questions to be considered by the Education and Training Committee:

(a) The effectiveness of current policies and programs for gifted and talented students, with particular consideration of, but not limited to:

i. Identification of gifted and talented students;
ii. Equity of access to quality educational choices for gifted and talented students and their families; and
iii. Impact on the learning, development and wellbeing of gifted and talented students;

My experience in Regional Victoria has been that teachers and schools have limited to no knowledge of current policies or programs for G&T students. Identification, if it occurs, is often through achievement tests and not through tests of potential.

The on-line programme for teachers, developed by Miraca Gross following the 2001 Senate Enquiry into Gifted Education, is available on the DEECD website. The awareness of and uptake in training of the programme is almost non-existent (refer to Part 2 for a detailed discussion and findings).

If students are not being identified and, as a result, having their unique and special educational, emotional, and social needs addressed and met, then the impact on these students is quite serious. As was found in the 2001 Senate Enquiry referred to earlier, 75% of gifted students underachieve in school and 40% leave school before the end of Year 12. This is an incredible waste of talent and a disservice to these students. Identification of, and resources made available to, special needs children are mandated by the Department. However, the same degree of services are not being made available to the children on the “other end of the bell curve”. The consequences of ignoring these children are just as serious as if the special needs children were not given assistance. While helping to bridge the educational gap between the special needs students and the ‘regular’ students is not in question, it is not acceptable only to help those children achieve to their best ability. Reaching minimum benchmark standards, surely, should not be the goal of education in this state. It should be to allow all students to perform to the best of their ability. For G&T students, a fair and equitable education system would permit them to excel with the appropriate curriculum and educational opportunities, supported by teachers who have been trained in and have an understanding of their special needs (academic, emotional and social). Unfortunately and tragically, such educational opportunities are rare, especially in Regional Victoria.

(b) The scope, coverage and effectiveness of current policies and programs for students from both metropolitan and regional school communities, school leaders, teachers and parents and carers to support gifted and talented students;

Regional Victoria is certainly disadvantaged in terms of having equal access to educational choices for G&T students, let alone quality educational choices in this
respect. I am unaware of any government primary school in the Ballarat area which offers official G&T services or programmes. Anything that is offered is *ad hoc* by teachers with very little, if any, training in gifted education. By contrast, many schools in Melbourne offer a multitude of options and services in the area of G&T education. As far as the secondary schools are concerned, one of Ballarat’s high schools offers the SEAL programme, while some of the private schools have made small efforts towards looking at the educational needs of their gifted students. In general, though, there is not a lot of focus on G&T education in the Ballarat and surrounding area. This is also true as far as the availability of assessment and identification services is concerned.

Resources devoted to gifted education in the Grampians Region of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development are virtually non-existent. Currently, there is only staff member employed by the Department to provide gifted education support for the entire Grampians region, with only a small fraction of her duties and responsibilities being allocated to G&T education. Obviously, there is a huge need for attention and resources to be devoted to G&T in the Grampians Region. Parents and teachers are needing support in this area. However, they have been told that there is no funding for expansion beyond a professional development for teachers offered only occasionally. There is limited follow-up in the schools with the teachers due to lack of staffing.

Basically, the Grampians region is starving for assistance and has been forced to neglect its gifted students. Regional students are no less talented or worthy than their metropolitan counterparts. Yet, it would seem that they are viewed as such based on the resources being made available to them.

**(c) Opportunities and strategies for enhancing support for gifted and talented students, their parents and carers, teachers and school leaders; and**

As stated above, the support for G&T students in the Grampians Region (specifically the Ballarat area) is negligible. Aside from the occasional PD offered to teachers, there is no training for teachers that is based locally. The only option is to travel to the metropolitan area schools/centres for training or to one of the Go8 universities. To help address this vacuum in G&T training, I am in preliminary discussions with the University of Ballarat to introduce and lecture in classes and/or workshops for pre-service teachers and classroom teachers. Likewise, I have had some brief discussions with the Grampians Region of DEECD.

**(d) Opportunities for improved educational offerings for gifted and talented students through collaboration across all school sectors and with community, business and industry.**

There is great potential for improving education offerings for G&T students in Regional Victoria. Mentoring programmes, for example (shown to greatly benefit these students), could be initiated with a number of community, business, and industry partners. However, in order for these and other programmes to be
successful, it is critical that they be set up and co-ordinated by people who understand gifted and talented students. Understanding comes with training and education – something severely lacking in Regional Victoria. Research shows (refer to Part 2) that the ‘wrong’ person/teacher leading/teaching a gifted programme can be more detrimental to the G&T student than not having a programme. A wonderful opportunity exists to invest in the future of our G&T students in Regional Victoria through funding programmes and training the people to run these programmes, both in schools and in the community.

Recognizing and supporting our gifted students is not being ‘elitist’. The elitist view is a narrow-minded one. Rather, it is our obligation to allow these students to go ‘beyond the norm’ and reach their potential. In so doing, we can release the next generation of artists, sportspeople, creative thinkers, environmentalist, scientist, community leaders, writers, philosophers, inventors, etc. who might not otherwise reach the heights that they have the potential to reach to contribute and play an important part in our society, local communities, nation and world.
PART 2 – What the research literature reveals about the importance of training teachers in gifted education and of providing appropriate education for gifted students

INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

It is doubtful that anyone would disagree that all students should receive the best possible educational experience during their schooling years, with the ideal goal being that all students be given the opportunity to reach their potential. This goal is no less true for gifted students.

Much study has been conducted on the role and impact of teachers on gifted students. A review of the literature has found that research studies suggest the following:

- that teachers play a crucial role in encouraging gifted students to reach their potential.
- that teachers’ positive attitudes about gifted education and gifted students have a positive impact on the students. Conversely, teachers who hold negative attitudes regarding gifted education and gifted students impact negatively on the students.

The correlation between teachers who have received professional learning in gifted education and the teachers’ subsequent outlooks and attitudes towards gifted students (when compared to their outlooks and attitudes prior to the professional learning) has been studied (Geake & Gross, 2008; Lassig, 2002; M Plunkett, 2002). These research studies indicate that appropriate professional learning for teachers in gifted education can have a significant positive effect on teachers’ attitudes toward gifted students.

With this in mind, the ideal would be for all teachers to receive some training in gifted education.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE

Five main areas will be discussed in this section and what the literature says about each:

1. Definitions and characteristics of gifted students
2. Positive and negative factors affecting gifted students in the education setting. The results of these factors on the outcomes for these students will also be noted.
3. The importance of teachers in the education of students and how they can make a positive impact on the gifted students in their classrooms.
4. The amount and type of training available to pre-service and classroom teachers in the area of gifted education.
5. The effect of training in assisting teachers and how it is able to help the teachers assist their gifted students reach their potential.
Definitions and characteristics of gifted students

Who are the gifted students? This is somewhat difficult to neatly define as there are many definitions of giftedness. Each definition emphasizes a slightly different aspect of the gifted learner with some definitions based on IQ, others on talent areas, on academic abilities, and/or on general characteristics. To illustrate, some of the definitions (Miller, 2008) from various researchers can be found below.

- **Terman**: Defines giftedness as scoring two standard deviations above the norm on the Stanford-Binet intelligence test.

- **Gardner**: Defines giftedness as a sign of precocious potential in one or more of independent multiple intelligences including linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligence.

- **Renzulli**: Defines giftedness as manifesting itself in two different kinds of persons: the schoolhouse-gifted person, who excels at test-taking and learning school lessons, and the creative-productive gifted person, whose giftedness manifests itself through the development of original products that have an impact on society. [The latter gifted person is described using] Renzulli's three-ring conception of giftedness.

- **Gagné**: Proposes a distinction between the concept of giftedness and the concept of talent in his Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT). Giftedness denotes untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities in at least one ability domain. The natural abilities of giftedness can develop over time through an interaction with intrapersonal and environmental catalysts and chance, leading to systematically developed skills or talent in a field of human endeavor. For both giftedness and talent, performance places the individual in the top 10% of age peers.

Gross (2000) categorizes giftedness based on a person’s IQ. She believes that intellectually gifted children can be classified as mildly, moderately, highly, exceptionally and profoundly gifted.

Whatever the wording of a final definition of giftedness, each definition, developed over the last 100 years, has three important elements in common (as stated in section 2.39 of the Australian Senate Enquiry on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children report (Senate Reference Committee, 2001)).

- gifted children have the potential for unusually high performance in at least one area
- the capacity to think clearly, analytically and evaluatively is a prerequisite for high performance in any area
- gifted children are not always successful. The child’s personality and environment can help to hinder the translation of potential into performance.

Positive and negative factors affecting gifted students in the education setting

The child’s environment includes home, school, and other areas and places in which the child spends time. It is the school environment that will be discussed here along with the
factors in the school environment which can hinder a gifted child from being able to develop their potential. Identifying these negative factors, looking at how or whether these factors can be altered or influenced for the positive will also be covered.

A school’s philosophy of education is a key influence over gifted students, proving to be a help or a hindrance to them reaching their potential. If “the duty of the education system is limited to ensuring that all students reach minimum standards supposed to be necessary to preserve a healthy, prosperous society” (section 2.23, (Senate Reference Committee, 2001)), then there seems no need to identify gifted students as these students are capable of reaching these minimum standards. In other words, these students are able to understand the material presented in the classroom and to complete the tasks required if they choose to do so. But is the goal of education just ensuring that all students ‘meet the minimum standard’ or should it be more? Is it possible that the ‘one way for all’ is not the ‘best way for all’?

Gifted children have the capacity to go further than the minimum if provided with the right environment. Gifted students need to be identified so that their unique needs are met in the classroom.

Apart from ‘resource to society’ arguments, on truly equitable grounds gifted children – like any others – deserve to have their intellectual, creative and affective potential realized and their specific talents developed. (Knopfelmacker & Kronborg, 2003)

In the field of education, particularly in the past, the belief that gifted students will succeed without any special intervention or assistance has been the opinion of many. In 2001, an Australian Senate Enquiry on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children (Senate Reference Committee, 2001) explored this myth and many other issues. This Australian Senate Enquiry received submissions from hundreds of experts, teachers and researchers in the field of gifted education. Listed below are a few of the findings from the Australian Senate Enquiry, as laid out in the Summary and Recommendations section, as they relate to the research done into the question of whether gifted students have special needs which should be addressed in the classroom.

There is a duty to help all children achieve their potential. The common belief that the gifted do not need special help because they will succeed anyway is contradicted by many studies of underachievement and demotivation among gifted students. (Section 2.5)

Without acceptance, support, and appropriately differentiated education, many gifted children will succeed regardless, but many will not. The evidence on this point is convincing. The catch-cries of ‘talent will out’ and ‘the cream will rise to the top’ derive from the assumption that all students of high ability will succeed, and that therefore those who do succeed (and are therefore most easily identifiable as gifted or talented) represent the full quota of those who have potential. Like most simplistic arguments, it is extremely seductive; however it is contradicted by the many studies of underachievement and serious demotivation among academically gifted children and adolescents.

Gifted children have special needs in the education system; for many their needs are not being met; and many suffer underachievement, boredom, frustration and psychological distress as a result. (Section 1.1)
In respect to the latter point, consider that an IQ over 130 is one of the factors to determine giftedness. Note that the average IQ in the general population is 100, and that an IQ below 70 qualifies a student for dedicated special education services. Under these criteria, gifted students are at least as far above the average IQ as the special education students are below the average (Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000). It would seem logical that students on the upper range should be provided with special accommodations also to meet their unique needs.

Yet gifted students are not generally recognized in most schools nor are their needs being met appropriately. This leads to undesirable consequences for the gifted students. Statistics from the research presented to the Australian Senate Enquiry show the following results in this respect:

- 75% of gifted students underachieve in school and
- 40% leave school before the end of Year 12.

Another aspect to consider is that, as a result of underachievement, some gifted students may not be immediately obvious to the teacher and may remain undetected despite their high potential. The Australian Senate Enquiry, mentioned above, also reported that:

Underachievement is common. This may mean anything from achieving less than their own potential, to achieving below average, to dropping out altogether. (Section 2.15)

It may include ‘masking’, where the child conceals giftedness for the sake of peer group acceptance:

Understanding gifted may ‘learn to be lazy’, and may not develop necessary work habits and skills … Another very unfortunate and all too common response is the hiding or ‘masking’ of their ability … to ‘norm reference’ so as not to appear different. (Section 2.16)

Identifying gifted students in the classroom is an important step in allowing these students to have a better chance of continuing their formal education and reaching their potential. Teachers can be a positive and constructive part of that opportunity for these students. They can, however, also be a negative and destructive part of the educational experience of gifted students. Both sides of this ‘coin of influence’ are discussed in the following section.

The importance of teachers

Teachers are important in the lives of all students. Research has shown that teachers play a significant and influential role in the education of their students, including gifted students (Lassig, 2002; McCooch, 2007; M Plunkett, 2002). From her review of the literature, Plunkett (2002) concluded that

teachers are important to gifted students …gifted students would not necessarily achieve spontaneously, and that teachers were, most likely, a significant variable in gifted students’ learning.
Lassig agrees and quotes Clark from his book *Growing Up Gifted* (Clark, 2002) where Clark argues “that teachers have the most significant influence on the learning, achievement and development of gifted students.” (Lassig, 2002)

This significant influence of the teacher can, unfortunately, be either positive or negative (Geake & Gross, 2008; Lassig, 2002; McCoach, 2007; M Plunkett, 2002). Whether a teacher’s attitude benefits or negatively impacts the gifted student is a factor of whether or not a teacher has had training in gifted education and how much has been completed.

“The study [conducted in the Gippsland Region of Victoria] indicates that the most significant factor was whether or not the teachers had undertaken specific study relating to gifted education.” (M Plunkett, 2002)

Research studies have found that teachers who have had gifted education training tend to have a more positive influence on the education of gifted students (Bain, Bliss, Choate, & Brown, 2007; Blumen-Pardo, 2002; Copenhaver & McIntyre, 1992; Cropley & McLeod, 1986; Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994; M Plunkett, 2002; Senate Reference Committee, 2001). As Plunkett illustrates, “teachers with informed attitudes toward gifted students might be seen as more likely to create an environment that was conducive to achievement” (M Plunkett, 2002). Conversely,

Lack of training and confidence, ignorance, and myths and anti-elitist beliefs about gifted children and their education are thought to be related to the negative attitudes towards giftedness prevalent in Australia” (Collins, 2001) cited by (Lassig, 2002).

This negative impact is by no means intentional on the part of the teacher. Even so-called ‘good’ teachers may not be helpful to gifted students if they have no training in this area.

“…‘Good’ teachers who are unprepared to teach gifted students may not only be ineffective with them, but may also become primary contributors to the development of underachievement behaviour and negative attitudes.” (Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994)

There is no doubt that teachers play an important role in the education of gifted students. It is clear that providing teachers with gifted education training is desirable and even necessary if the aim of schools is to enable all their students to reach their potential. With education comes understanding and the ability to better assist this special group of students (Knopfelmacker & Kronborg, 2003; Senate Reference Committee, 2001). The more they are educated in the area of gifted education, the more positive their influence will be on the gifted students in their classroom (Blumen-Pardo, 2002; Copenhaver & McIntyre, 1992; Cropley & McLeod, 1986; Knopfelmacker & Kronborg, 2003; Senate Reference Committee, 2001).

All agreed that better teacher training and better curriculum support are essential to ensure that teachers are able to differentiate the curriculum for gifted children. (Section 1.3) (Senate Reference Committee, 2001)

**The amount and type of training available to pre-service and classroom teachers in the area of gifted education**

Most teachers do not have any formal training in gifted education (M Plunkett & Kronborg, 2007; Senate Reference Committee, 2001). This Australian Senate Enquiry into the
Education of Gifted and Talented Children was provided with submissions from experts and researchers in its investigation of this issue of teacher training. The provision and availability of pre-service training, further study opportunities for teachers, and professional development for teachers was looked at as a means of addressing this problem. Among its many findings, the Australian Senate Enquiry concluded that “Exposure to gifted education issues is important to dispel misconceptions and negative attitudes that arise from lack of training and lack of confidence.” In relation to teacher training, the Enquiry was presented with many submissions from which it found the following.

**Pre-service teachers / new graduates**
- Newly graduated teachers have little or no training in techniques of teaching gifted children.
- The majority of beginning teachers have virtually no training in how to recognize and cater for the gifted students they will encounter in each year of their teaching career.
- The majority of universities do not offer gifted education courses as either an elective or mandatory component of pre-service teacher training courses.
- Pre-service teachers hold negative perceptions of gifted students, particularly girls, compared with other students (Department of Education Employment and Training, 2001)

**Retraining / further education for teachers**
- Tertiary courses were considered inaccessible or impractical for many classroom teachers due to financial and/or time constraints.
- Postgraduate training is necessary to provide the future academics needed to teach undergraduates, yet very few higher education institutions in Australia offer courses in gifted education to address this need.

**Professional development opportunities**
- Although many organizations offer professional development in gifted education, the Australian Senate Enquiry found that these were often *ad hoc* or at the discretion of school administration, many of whom had negative views of gifted education and so did not encourage their teachers to attend any training in this area.
- Teachers who already had a negative view of gifted education and/or of gifted students were far less likely to attend these sessions.
- In response to the finding of the Australian Senate Enquiry and as a means of addressing this less than ideal situation about the lack of teacher training in the area of gifted education, a set of professional development modules was developed by Miraca Gross from the University of New South Wales. The modules were made available on CD-ROM form to all Australian schools in 2005 as well as being available on-line (Gifted Education Research Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC), et al., 2005). In this way, it was hoped to enable all teachers to gain the necessary training in the important area of gifted education.
- “Ongoing in depth professional development for teachers is a very powerful change agent. Networks provide a very good model for provision of professional development, local advice and practical support.” (Department of Education Employment and Training, 2001)
The effect of training in assisting teachers and how it is able to help the teachers assist their students reach their potential

The Australian Senate Enquiry, as well as other researchers, have cited some of the problems with this situation of the majority of teachers being untrained and/or minimally trained in this area.

- Teachers untrained to identify gifted children do not identify them reliably. Therefore the unidentified children cannot be provided with the differentiated curriculum that researchers show these students need (Knopfelmacker & Kronborg, 2003; Van Tassel-Baska, 1998).
- Better teacher training is essential to enable teachers to better differentiate the curriculum for gifted children.
- Training is essential to introduce teachers to research findings and to dispel misconceptions about gifted children, misconceptions which are held because contrary research findings are not widely known.
- Inadequate training is an important cause of negative attitudes among teachers. Ill-equipped teachers are liable to feel professionally inadequate and resentful.

Teachers need support to have confidence in working with gifted children if they are to be able to do their job most effectively. This training will, in turn, benefit the gifted student as well as their classmates.

FINDINGS

The review of the literature shows that Australia is making progress in the field of gifted education. It was encouraging to discover that much study has been conducted in the field of gifted education. However, I believe that more work still needs to be done to prepare pre-service teachers and to educate classroom teachers in gifted education.

This point is illustrated by reading two issues of the Gifted Child Quarterly journal. In 1982, the journal devoted one of its issues to discuss the many myths surrounding gifted education.

Those myths included:

- the gifted constitutes a single, homogenous group;
- the gifted constitutes 3-5% of the population;
- creativity is too difficult to measure;
- one programme suits all;
- gifted education means having a programme;
- we need to have the same scores for everyone;
- the Patch-On approach to services; and
- there must be ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in identification and programming.

As a follow up issue, the Gifted Child Quarterly revisited these myths in 2009 to see which, if any, of the myths still existed. It found that all of the 1982 myths are still with us, although some have been modified slightly. In addition, more myths were identified, which included:

- high ability students don’t face problems and challenges;
gifted students don’t have unique social and/or emotional needs; and
it’s ‘fair’ to teach all children the same way.

It is, therefore, seen to be of great importance not only to make gifted education training in some form to all pre-service and classroom teachers, but also to encourage teacher participation in this training.

DISCUSSION

The results of the literature review were very clear in stating that teachers play a very important role in the lives of gifted students. It is unfortunate that many in the field of education hold the belief that gifted students will succeed without any special intervention or assistance. This attitude and others like it are not beneficial to the students or to the teacher. The gifted students are left to ‘do well’ without the differentiation of the curriculum that they require to remain engaged at school and to reach their potential. Although some gifted students will succeed regardless, it was discovered that most in this group of students will underachieve and/or leave school early as a result of their unique learning needs not being met. The figures for these statistics presented earlier are alarming, especially when you consider the faces and lives of the students behind the numbers and what a lot of wonderful and incredible potential is going unrecognized and undeveloped.

On the other hand, the literature is clear that education and training in gifted education improves teacher attitudes toward gifted students and gifted education. These teachers’ attitudes can have a positive effect on the emotional needs of the gifted students. With the information and knowledge received through education and training, the teachers are better able to differentiate the curriculum and to provide for the academic needs of these students.

If educating teachers in gifted education enables them to be more effective teachers of the gifted, it would seem logical and of high importance, to provide professional development and training in gifted education to all teachers as well as making these opportunities more easily available and attractive to attend. Unfortunately, most teachers do not have any formal training in gifted education with few taking advantage of the limited opportunities that are available.

The fact that pre-service training in this area is virtually non-existent is a cause for concern. Not only are new teachers entering the classroom unprepared to deal with gifted students, up to 10% of their student population, but any negative views or stereotypes that they may have will remain. Provision of professional development in this area should be a high priority in order to reach all classroom teachers and to positively change attitudes. The DEET submission summarizes the situation in our schools well with the following quote:

Currently benchmarks focus on achievement not potential. This provides insufficient data to plan for gifted students. The response to benchmarks tends to be on bringing the bottom group up without extending the top group. Much of the extension that is provided appears to be ad hoc, nonsequential and disconnected from the normal classroom curriculum. Gifted programs should be well planned, sequential and differentiated. They must be connected to
the class curriculum if there is to be a positive and lasting impact on gifted students and hence performance against benchmark. (Department of Education Employment and Training, 2001)

Education of teachers and administrators will assist in making these necessary and important changes in the schools.

The School Census 2000 (cited in Department of Education and Employment and Training, 2001) shows "a correlation between teacher participation in gifted education professional development and the school’s support in gifted education of gifted students". Education of teachers and administrators in this area, therefore, needs to be encouraged and supported.

The issue of how to encourage teachers and administrators to engage in gifted education professional development is an area that I would like to study further. The fact that those with a negative view of gifted education (and therefore, those who would benefit most from training in this area) are the least likely to attend professional developments is a cause for concern. It would be valuable to investigate how to encourage teachers to participate in professional developments. The results of this investigation could be used to help inform professional development practitioners on how best to attract and meet the needs of teachers to professional learning activities.

The goal should be to encourage and inform teachers in regard to gifted education by meeting them at their point of need and guiding them from that point, so that ultimately they can better serve the needs of the gifted students in their classrooms.
PART 3 – Suggestions for the future

In light of all that has been presented in this submission, it can be seen that a stronger emphasis, focus on, and resources devoted to, the gifted and talented is needed in Victoria, especially Regional Victoria. The benefits are clear if changes are made, as are the losses if nothing changes.

For my part, I wish to be part of a solution to the gaping vacuum of services devoted to gifted education in Regional Victoria and would welcome the opportunity to work closely with the Grampians Region of DEECD. Gaining a better understanding of the needs and mindset of our regional teachers in the area of gifted education is needed. In turn, providing effective training opportunities for these teachers would allow them to feel more confident in the classroom to better meet the needs of our gifted and talented students. In so doing, our G&T students would not be educationally disadvantaged and would be valued in our schools.

Funding needs to be made available to the region so that appropriately trained G&T support staff could be employed by the Department to visit schools and classrooms. The primary role of these staff would be to conduct professional development sessions/workshops and provide mentoring and encouragement to teachers as they learn to help their G&T students.

Parental information/support groups would be useful also, although perhaps not within the scope of this inquiry.

If gifted and talented education is made a priority of the Government, with some real and tangible programmes and strategies put into place, then perhaps we could begin to address the important needs of our gifted students. Rhetoric and web resources are not enough. They must be supported by funds, training and personnel to ensure that these programmes and strategies are adopted by the schools in a positive manner. As research shows, any programme or teaching strategy which is of benefit to gifted students can be beneficial to the other students in the class. In effect, initiatives in support of gifted students will go a long way to enhancing the learning and success of the entire student population.
REFERENCE LIST


