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Talented and Gifted Students eTAGS

Overview

Supporting teachers to develop
the talents of gifted students

Produced by

Gifted and Talented Branch

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Department of
Education



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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Related policies, procedures and guidelines	5
Who are the gifted and talented?	6
Roles and responsibilities of schools	7
Identification	8
Provision	10
Developing a school-based program	13
Monitoring	13
Staff support and professional learning	14
References and further reading	15
Appendices	16



Introduction

The Western Australian Department of Education bases its following definitions on Gagné (2008) with **Giftedness** as a student's outstanding potential and ability in one or more domains and **Talent** as outstanding performance in one or more fields of human activity. Talent is viewed as emerging from ability as a consequence of a range of environmental, interpersonal and chance factors as shown in Appendix 1: Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent.

The Department's Gifted and Talented policy and guidelines charge all schools with the responsibility for identifying and meeting the needs of gifted and talented students. Classroom-based differentiation of the curriculum involves various modifications to meet the needs of all students and is a requirement of the *Curriculum Framework*. Curriculum differentiation encourages all students to reach for their personal best and develops a classroom culture of motivation and challenge. For gifted and talented students, supplementary, selective and specialist programs provide additional access, opportunities and pathways in Western Australian public schools.

Related policies, procedures and guidelines

The following Department of Education policies and procedures are related to the Gifted and Talented Policy:

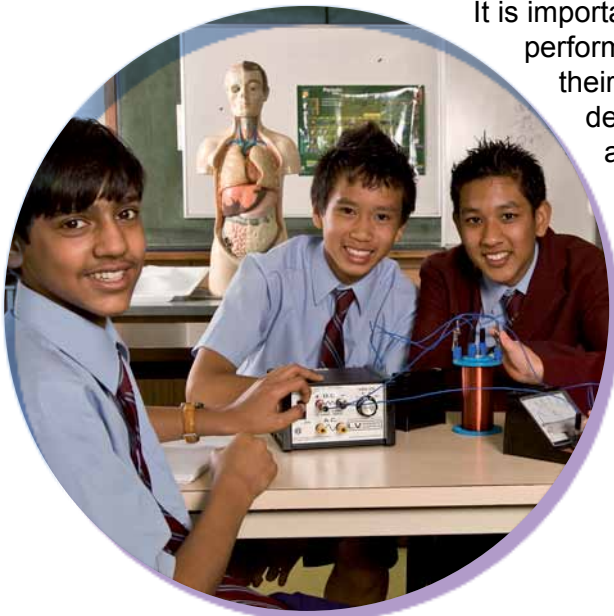
- Curriculum Framework (2001)
- Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting K–10: Policy and Guidelines
- Excursions Off School Site Activities
- Gifted and Talented policy
- Students at Educational Risk (SAER)
- Enrolment.

Who are the gifted and talented?

Gifted and talented students come from all socioeconomic and cultural groups and are part of the population of almost all schools. Many of these students are at risk of not achieving to their full potential. The reasons for this are varied.

- Some students choose to mask their ability in order to 'fit in' with their same-age peers.
- A second group of students, while identified and achieving at high levels without assistance, do not reach their full potential because their abilities are not fostered through appropriate educational provision.
- Other identified students clearly do not achieve to their potential due to physical, emotional, motivational and social factors or specific learning difficulties.
- Some students simply are not identified; their gifts and talents are masked by cultural or other background factors.
- It should be noted that child prodigies and geniuses belong to a very small percentage of the gifted population and from this group those who succeed at school form only a proportion of that same population.

A student's giftedness is not always apparent in regular curriculum areas and not always demonstrated in appropriate ways. While gifted students exhibit some common traits, no two gifted students possess the same characteristics. Giftedness can be viewed in multiple ways and children may be gifted in one or several ability domains.



It is important that students with exceptional potential or performance are identified early and fostered during their primary years in order to ensure that the development of specific gifts and talents continues as they make their educational transition into the secondary school. At the secondary level there should be further monitoring to discover new or emerging talents.

Roles and responsibilities of schools

Principals, teachers and support personnel (such as school psychologists and library staff) have a responsibility to be aware of current issues and processes involved with the identification of gifted and talented students and the provision of programs for these students. They need to:

- accept that these students have a right to access learning programs that match their ability and provide appropriate opportunities
- appreciate that gifted and talented students' abilities can be at different levels in different areas of endeavour
- acknowledge that the emotional development of gifted and talented students does not necessarily match their ability in other domains
- recognise emotional and social problems of gifted and talented students and be aware that the emotional needs of the students must be addressed
- develop gifted and talented students' understanding and acceptance of themselves
- develop an understanding and acceptance of gifted and talented students by others
- be supportive of the intellectual, social and emotional needs of individual students.

The principal's role

Principals play a critical role in establishing an accepting and encouraging learning environment for gifted and talented students in their school and in the broader community. Additionally, principals need to monitor policy implementation and ensure that information about gifted and talented student outcomes is part of a school's information system. Appropriate information should be considered and reported as part of the school review process. Particular attention should be given to systems that ensure students from a range of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds have not been overlooked and that those who are underachieving are catered for.



The teacher's role

Teachers need to monitor students' progress carefully to identify possible gifted and talented students, gather information about the students they have identified using a range of strategies, ensure no student or group of students has been omitted and incorporate relevant data into the school's information system. Once students have been identified, it is then crucial that differentiated provision is made for these students by teachers in their day-to-day teaching, through a range of strategies. Teachers will need to make provision for some students in almost all classes they teach. Appropriate provision for gifted and talented students has the capacity to provide a range of benefits to the majority of students.

Identification

The quality of the teaching and learning environment is critical to the identification process. Programs should enable outstanding abilities of students to emerge and be recognised. Teachers need to be aware of the issues associated with judgements about potential and performance. The identification of gifted and talented students is more about the conditions and context in which their performance is assessed than their achievement against predetermined criteria.



Gifted and talented students are not a homogeneous group. The range of talents and levels of emotional, social and physical development varies significantly. As a result, the behaviours of these students in the classroom may be quite diverse. They are not necessarily the high achievers, the most attentive, or the most cooperative in terms of task completion and compliance in the classroom. Schools should implement strategies to identify all gifted and talented students, and in particular those who, for various reasons of disadvantage, may not be recognised.

Principles of identification

The identification process should:

- be **inclusive**, to ensure gifted and talented students are not educationally disadvantaged on the basis of racial, cultural or socioeconomic background, physical or sensory disability, geographic location or gender
- be a **flexible and continuous process**, to allow for the recognition of gifts and talents which may emerge or be recognisable at any stage of a student's education
- utilise **information from a variety of sources**, including classroom teacher observation and assessment, as well as knowledge obtained from other people (for example, parents/guardians and peers)
- help the **teacher identify a student's intellectual strengths, talents, and social and emotional needs**, which will form the basis for educational provision.



Identification processes

Gifted and talented students possess a range of special learning characteristics and socio-emotional dispositions. There is no single technique which teachers can be certain will allow gifted and talented students to be identified. A combination of techniques is necessary and information incorporated from a variety of sources including teachers, school psychologists and other school personnel, parents/guardians and students.

The identification process should include:

- 1 Classroom and school-based information
 - teacher observation
 - school records
 - behaviour checklists
 - class evaluations
- 2 Standardised assessments
 - achievement tests
 - intelligence tests
 - creativity tests
- 3 Parent/guardian involvement:
 - they observe their child in a context other than school
 - are aware of their child's interests and hobbies, as well as their early development and capacity for learning new material
 - has been shown that parents/guardians demonstrate a high degree of reliability in being able to accurately identify their child as being gifted or talented
- 4 Information from peers and students' self-reflections
 - can provide valuable insights to build a comprehensive profile and inform provision planning more effectively.



Provision

It is important that each gifted and talented student's abilities be accepted, valued and fostered by teachers, parents/guardians, peers and the community. A range of opportunities are available for gifted and talented students in Western Australian public schools.

School-based provision ensures schools and teachers provide a challenging and extended curriculum to enable the gifts and talents of students to emerge, be recognised and be developed. Primary and secondary school-based provision occurs within individual classrooms of all teachers on an ongoing basis. Additionally, schools may develop strategies which allow the most able students to learn together.



Supplementary provision enables the most gifted and talented students to work with like-minded peers in specific curriculum fields at higher levels than can normally be provided in the regular classroom or school. Primary Extension and Challenge programs offer a range of opportunities for identified primary students in Years 5–7 to work with like-minded peers on more complex and conceptually demanding programs. Centrally endorsed, specialist programs offer enriched programs in academic and applied studies, arts and sports. A school-based selection process is undertaken to select students for these programs.



Selective programs offer full-time options for secondary students identified through a rigorous, centrally coordinated selection process.

Principals have a responsibility to ensure that parents/guardians are fully informed about the range of opportunities available to meet the varied needs of their gifted and talented children.

Program development

All programs for gifted and talented students should:

- engender open-endedness which encourages student choice and negotiation
- enable student interaction with practising experts so that first-hand investigations can be undertaken (eg guest speakers, excursions, mentors)
- encourage students to take risks and back their judgement when experimenting with new styles, ideas and approaches to learning or discovery
- facilitate the pursuit of in-depth investigation of real problems and the presentation of results to an appropriate audience
- include opportunities for accelerated progress in specific subject areas or across the curriculum
- enable students to work conceptually with greater depth and complexity
- require students to evaluate and reflect upon their own products and learning outcomes
- encourage constructive criticism and feedback
- include opportunities for accelerated progress in specific subject areas or across the curriculum.



Differentiated curriculum

Gifted and talented students should be provided with a curriculum that is differentiated in terms of learning experiences, teaching methods and teacher expectations. They need to be challenged with a curriculum that is conceptually demanding, complex and wide ranging in scope. Modifications to the content, processes (teaching and learning strategies and methodology), product (opportunities to demonstrate learning) and learning environment will ensure that the needs of all students are met whilst specifically addressing the learning requirements of gifted and talented students (see Appendix 2: Teaching and learning adjustments).

The disposition of the teacher is critical. High teacher expectations and effective student engagement will have a significant impact on the development of higher order outcomes, commensurate with ability.

Approaches and strategies

Approaches and strategies for the provision of a differentiated curriculum are equally relevant to primary and secondary schools and to in-class and supplementary provision. These approaches can be combined in a variety of ways and include:

- enrichment – broadening the range of experiences for all students
- extension – encouraging expansion of knowledge and skills in the regular curriculum
- acceleration – enabling gifted and talented students to participate in learning based on their performance, usually with older students.

For more information see Appendix 3: Forms of provision.



Acceleration

Acceleration is a placement strategy that enables a gifted student to work within an older chronological grouping, “... enabling a student to move through an educational program at a faster rate than usual, or at a younger than typical age.” (Assouline, Colangelo & Gross, 2004, P5)

The decision to accelerate any student needs to be made with considerable care by the principal in consultation with the student, parents/guardians, teachers and school psychologists. The development of a range of suitable options to meet the students learning needs, of which acceleration may be one possibility, is necessary in this process.

Decisions regarding full-time acceleration of younger students in particular should proceed only after thorough and careful consideration of the implications for the long-term schooling experience of the student. These include the academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs of the student. In certain situations acceleration may be the best option for a small number of exceptionally gifted students.

- Decisions may have to be made on behalf of younger students to address their individual learning needs.
- The *Curriculum Framework* and best-practice gifted and talented principles of assessment need to be kept in mind when evaluating the suitability of acceleration: any measure of the student’s readiness to accelerate should be valid, educative, explicit, fair, and comprehensive.
- Decisions for student acceleration are at the principal’s discretion.
- Decisions for student acceleration into selective programs and selective schools are at the discretion of the Gifted and Talented Branch based on centralised testing.



Developing a school-based program

Planning for school-based provision should be incorporated into the school development planning process. Each school-based program for gifted and talented students should reflect the school's unique priorities, population and individual learning needs as documented in the school development plan. Organisation should be sufficiently flexible to allow for the movement of students in and out of programs as needs are identified. The following steps can be used to guide the development process:

- 1 Conduct a school needs assessment.
- 2 Gather student information for accurate identification.
- 3 Consider the model of curriculum provision.
- 4 Review provision and organisational options.
- 5 Identify support requirements for the socio-emotional and special needs of gifted and talented students.
- 6 Consider staffing options.
- 7 Implement program evaluation measures.
- 8 Adopt a wider community approach.

For further information refer to the eTAGS resource for each phase of development.

Monitoring

Ongoing and systematic monitoring of the quality of policy implementation should occur at school, district and central levels.

At the school level, monitoring of the education of gifted and talented students is an integral part of the regular development and planning processes. Processes to monitor and report on the quality of implementation of policy should be negotiated by the principal at the district level with the Director of Schools (see Appendix 4: Monitoring and evaluation).

It is the responsibility of the Director of Schools to monitor and report to the appropriate Executive Director on the effectiveness of school planning in developing provisions for gifted and talented students, including identification processes and provision strategies used in schools and districts.

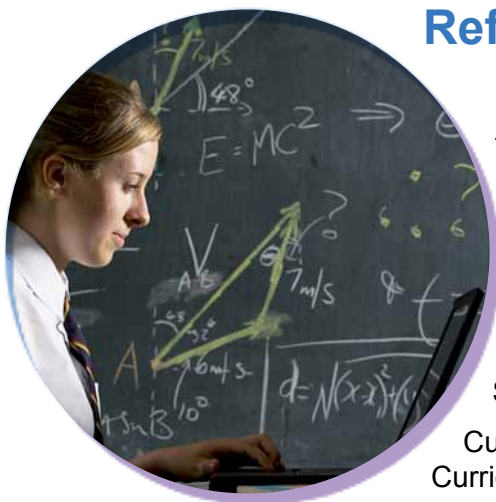
At the central level, analysis and review of supplementary and approved specialist programs should be undertaken and reports developed to evaluate policy and the quality of implementation.

Staff support and professional learning

Ongoing attention to professional learning will ensure that programs for gifted and talented students are consistent with international research and reflect current thought and practice. Professional learning support is available through:

- the eTAGS resource which is available on a CD-ROM, or downloadable through the Department of Education, Gifted and Talented website at www.det.wa.edu.au/giftedandtalented.
- the *Gifted and Talented Education Professional Development Package for Teachers* (2004) an **online professional learning program**. The program was developed by the Department of Education, Science and Training, in collaboration with the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) and the University of New South Wales. The six module program is available at core, specialisation and extension levels. The program provides differentiated options for teachers, school executive and principals in rural or urban settings. The program is available and can be accessed via the GERRIC website at <http://gerric.arts.unsw.edu.au/> or directly through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website at www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/gifted_education_professional_development_package.htm.

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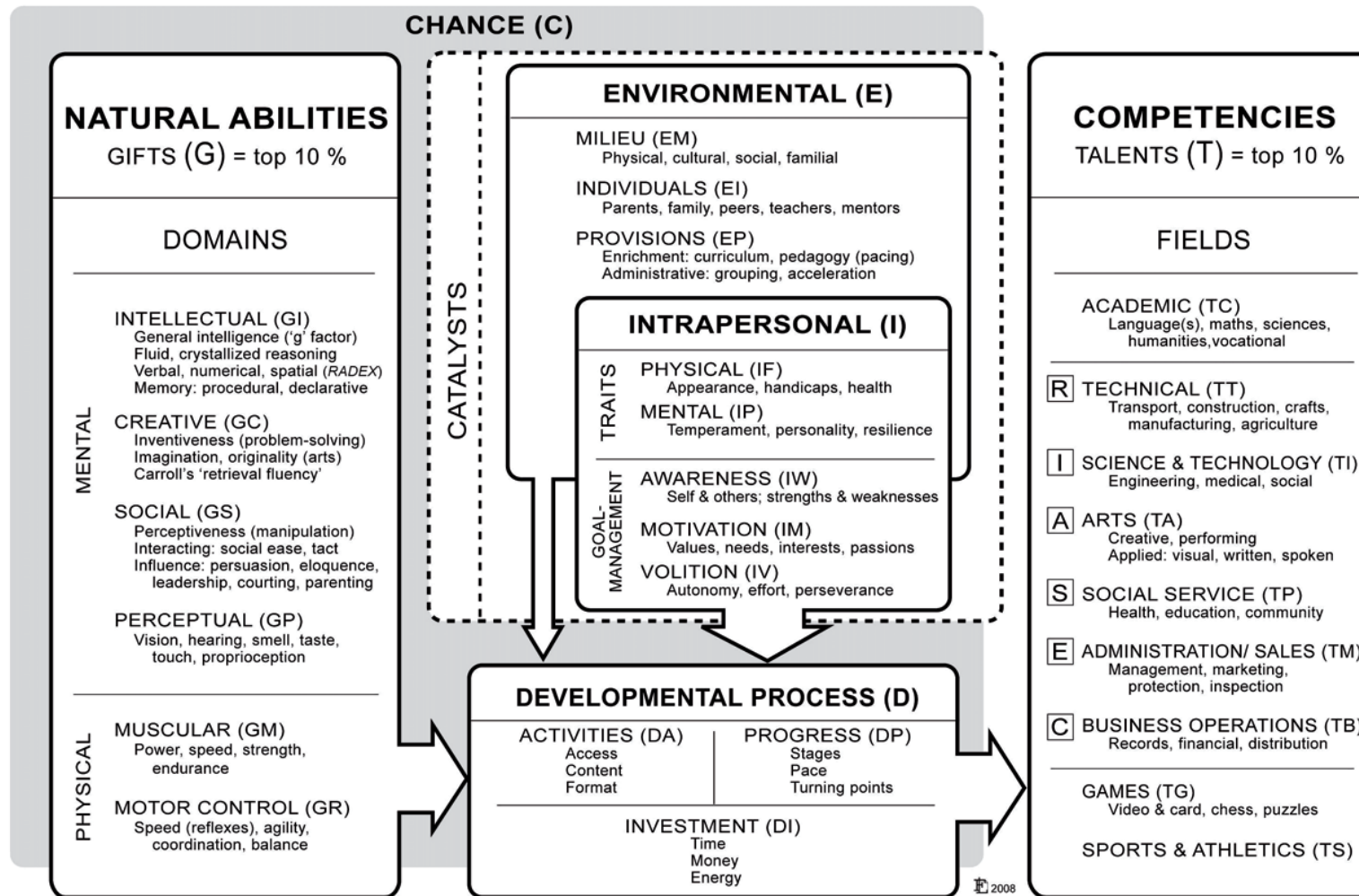
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The Gifted Education Research, Resource Information Centre audio series "*What the Research Tells Us ...*" annotated bibliographies/resource tapes/CDs, available at http://gerric.arts.unsw.edu.au/resc_tpes.html

Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent



Gagné, F 2008 'Building gifts into talents: Overview of the DMGT.' keynote address at the 10th Asia-Pacific Conference for Giftedness, Asia-Pacific Federation of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, Singapore, 14–17 July 2008.

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APPENDIX 2: Teaching and learning adjustments

Teaching and learning adjustments should:

- be flexible to match each student's knowledge, abilities, needs and phrases of learning
- include a range of group and individual activities to accommodate different abilities, skills and learning rates
- enable the development of generic skills and higher order thinking skills and strategies
- allow negotiation of self-selected topics for learning within established curriculum parameters
- be open-ended; encouraging questioning and tasks which allow students to construct knowledge
- demonstrate logical, critical, creative, lateral and parallel forms of thinking
- pay attention to product and the demonstration of achievement in student's learning
- encourage students to help other students with their learning
- explore the possibilities of open learning, telematics, multi-campus developments, external education sites and other resources.

Teachers should expect that gifted and talented students are capable of learning how to:

- direct, manage, negotiate and evaluate their own learning
- consider relationships and generate new ideas, hypotheses and creative solutions
- become producers, rather than reproducers, of knowledge
- develop skills of critical analysis and creativity; apply analytical processes for problem solving and decision making
- make defensible judgements and evaluate their own ideas and those of others
- work confidently in independent and cooperative situations
- enjoy learning.

APPENDIX 3: Forms of provision

Enrichment . . .

broadens the range of experiences for all students.

Enrichment is vital for students who may experience educational disadvantage due to language, cultural or low socioeconomic background.

Enrichment activities include:

- excursions
- competitions
- clubs
- guest speakers
- online learning.

Enrichment assists improve skills such as:

- creative thinking
- problem solving
- questioning
- independent research.

Extension . . .

encourages expansion of knowledge and skills in the regular curriculum.

Learning new strategies for constructing knowledge is a particularly important goal for extension programs.

Extension can be provided through a range on-site learning centres using negotiated curriculum contracts within the school, with community mentors or through peer tutoring. Appropriate strategies are fundamental to the quality extension program.

Examples include:

- learning centres
- challenge centres
- parallel programming
- tiered assignment/ learning activities
- contracts
- mentors
- camps.

Acceleration . . .

enables gifted and talented students to participate in learning based on their performance, usually with older students.

Acceleration can be provided through:

- early entry of children to formal schooling, secondary or post compulsory options
- cluster groupings within the class
- cross setting and cross grading
- compacting/ telescoping the curriculum to allow exemption from knowledge and skills already demonstrated
- placement in a specific subject area at a higher year level within a classroom, within a school, across primary school and secondary school or across a secondary school and a post-secondary institution
- year skipping or placement at a higher year level
- whole group acceleration, where a whole class is provided with fast-paced learning.

APPENDIX 4: Monitoring and evaluation

The following questions are provided to assist schools to monitor their planning processes and student outcomes:

- How has the school identified its gifted and talented students?
- Who are the identified gifted and talented students in each year group?
- Do the identified gifted and talented students in the school represent different cultural and socioeconomic groups? Are other 'disadvantaged' groups represented?
- How does the school provide a differentiated curriculum which draws on the experiences and interests of its gifted and talented students?
- How are teachers provided with the support they need to develop their in-class provision?
- Which students, parents/guardians and teachers participate in decisions about the curriculum for gifted and talented students in the school?
- Have special structures and organisations been developed to allow students access to:
 - school-based programs and
 - supplementary programs?
- What are the achievement levels of the school's gifted and talented students?
- How are these achievements analysed for planning purposes?
- How many of the school's identified gifted and talented students are performing at significantly higher levels than their age peers?
- What proportion of gifted and talented students is underachieving?
- How does the school provide public recognition of the performance of its gifted and talented students and report information to parents/guardians?
- Does the school community recognise and value the achievements of its gifted and talented students?

A range of checklists and feedback forms are available in the eTAGS resource for each phase of development.



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