

AAEGT DVD booklet:



## THE GIFTED PUZZLE

**Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted  
and Talented (AAEGT) Ltd**

*Finding out about gifted children, trying to define their differences and identify and develop their talents, understanding how they feel and what they need to thrive and succeed – these are all pieces of the intricate puzzle facing many parents and teachers of gifted children. All want what's best for the child and all strive to provide fulfilling and challenging experiences that enrich and extend gifted children, encouraging them to grow and explore rewarding future pathways in life.*

In 2004, the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented Ltd. (AAEGT), with the support of a Telstra Foundation grant, filmed gifted children from across the nation at a camp in Morriset, north of Sydney. Their parents feature strongly in the resulting 30 minute DVD and video. Issues such as isolation, identification, myths, home/school partnerships, transitions (including acceleration) and networking are addressed and a school demonstrates how they cater for a gifted child. We hear the voices of the children themselves, as well as those of parents and educators involved in their education and upbringing.

This resource demonstrates AAEGT's commitment to informing parents and teachers and acting as a vital link for the continuing Australia-wide exchange of information about giftedness, as well as ideas, personal experiences and research.

Presenters will find this resource invaluable for raising awareness of some important issues associated with giftedness. Any group of interested people can use the DVD/video as a starting point for discussion, planning and action for gifted children. It is available on loan free-of-charge from state and territory gifted associations, or you can purchase your own copy at cost.

### **Connections**

Many parents first suspect their child may be gifted in situations where they are with other children of the same chronological age, for instance alongside peers at playgroup or other preschool gatherings. For some parents the process of finding out why their child is different may be lengthy and difficult at times.

Parents, teachers and gifted children need to make connections, not only among themselves, through their state and territory gifted associations, but also with the information and advice vital to finding satisfactory, fulfilling pathways, through education and in later life. All education systems and all schools can be expected to make provisions for gifted children. Some quick searching will reveal relevant state and territory policies related to the education of the gifted for exploration and enactment by everyone interested in giftedness and the realisation of human potential.

Gifted children will need opportunities to interact with like minds, and parents will need to find others with whom they can identify issues to explore (and problems to solve) that relate to raising gifted children.

Parents should be encouraged to search websites, read books and articles, and make contact with their local gifted and talented support groups. Gifted children are, like all children, unique and individual, thus requiring individual responses, through parents' and teachers' research, to find information most relevant to their situation. This provides the basis for planning and implementing appropriate learning experiences. Finding a peer group is an important connection that can benefit both gifted children and their parents.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Why do people think I'm forcing my child to do advanced work when he is continually asking for it?*

*What do I do about a child who's achieving like she should be in university at 14 years of age?*

*Why is it so hard to define giftedness without sounding elitist?*

### **Connections across Australia:**

#### **New South Wales Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc.**

Email: [office@nswagtc.org.au](mailto:office@nswagtc.org.au)

Website: [www.nswagtc.org.au](http://www.nswagtc.org.au)

#### **Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc.**

Email: [info@vagtc.asn.au](mailto:info@vagtc.asn.au)

Website: [www.vagtc.asn.au](http://www.vagtc.asn.au)

#### **Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc.**

Email: [office@qagtc.org.au](mailto:office@qagtc.org.au)

Website: [www.qagtc.org.au](http://www.qagtc.org.au)

#### **Professional Association of Parents and Teachers of the Gifted (ProAPT) WA**

Website: [www.proapt.net](http://www.proapt.net)

#### **Gifted and Talented Children's Association of Western Australia**

Email: [gatca-wa@gatcawa.org](mailto:gatca-wa@gatcawa.org)

Website: [www.gatcawa.org](http://www.gatcawa.org)

#### **Gifted and Talented Children's Association of South Australia Inc.**

Email: [info@gtcasa.asn.au](mailto:info@gtcasa.asn.au)

Website: [www.gtcasa.asn.au](http://www.gtcasa.asn.au)

#### **Tasmanian Association for the Gifted Inc.**

Email: [tasgifted@tassie.net.au](mailto:tasgifted@tassie.net.au)

Website: [www.tasgifted.org.au](http://www.tasgifted.org.au)

#### **Northern Territory Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented Inc.**

Website: [www.ntaegt.org.au](http://www.ntaegt.org.au)

#### **Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented Ltd.**

Website: [www.aaegt.net.au](http://www.aaegt.net.au)

Email: [info@aaegt.net.au](mailto:info@aaegt.net.au)

### **Identification**

Parents play an important role in identification and they may be the first to realise that their child is gifted. Even at a very early age parents may be aware that their child is progressing at a different rate from other children of a similar age. The research literature on giftedness suggests that parents are good judges of the broad indicators of giftedness, especially if they have some knowledge of the field, but need help with identifying the finer details of giftedness. In contrast some parents are confused by the complex behaviours they witness and feel like they are traversing a minefield as they seek to understand their children.

For highly gifted children, quality standardised testing, with appropriate educational placement and extension, is necessary to avoid underachievement and low self-esteem. Early contact with the state or territory gifted and talented association to access information and resources, as well as discuss the child's development and behaviour, is important. This contact can assist parents and teachers to understand the gifted child's special needs.

Parents can consider keeping a portfolio of the child's:

- drawings
- books read
- types/levels of activities the child engages in as he/she grows
- age when milestones achieved, eg. beginning to recognise colours
- numeracy understanding and achievements
- language development

This portfolio will assist the school to provide an appropriate educational program for the child.

At school the identification process should involve parents as well as school personnel and should include more than one identification tool. A child may be gifted in one area or in several. Intellectual giftedness is often linked to academic achievement and schools can make use of

- checklists and nomination forms, such as:
  - parent nomination
  - teacher nomination
  - peer nomination
  - self nomination
- observation and evaluation of classroom tasks, for example:
  - products
  - performances
  - academic grades
- results of competitions the child participates in
- interviews with the child and parents
- standardised IQ tests
- other standardised tests
- observations

Whatever procedures are used to identify gifted children within a school they should:

- use more than one instrument
- ensure that children from disadvantaged and minority groups are included, such as
  - underachievers
  - gifted learning disabled
  - children from culturally diverse backgrounds
  - socio-economically disadvantaged children
- allow for children to be identified at any stage
- provide opportunities for children to be identified as a result of appropriate curriculum taught within the school
- recognise all domains of giftedness
- be school-wide

Not everyone appreciates what giftedness is, nor can they easily see it in children. A systematic defensible process for identifying giftedness enables schools to recognise and plan for their gifted students. If parents have any concerns about the processes used to identify gifted children within school systems, the first step is to discuss these concerns with the relevant organisation. Also remember the gifted associations are there to help parents and teachers, as well as providing student support.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Is an IQ test required for a child to be identified as gifted?*

*Why do some people actively oppose identifying giftedness in children?*

*How can parents help the school recognise that a child is gifted?*

### **Isolation**

Recognition of a child's giftedness often comes as a great relief for parents. Some struggle to understand their child and identification provides an answer. This piece of the puzzle sees the beginning of another part of the journey that is *raising a gifted child*.

However uncomfortable we are with the term 'gifted' we have to act for these children so they can find places where they feel 'normal', where there's the possibility of a soul mate, and where it is usual to want to work at high levels without feeling too different.

Parents and children move from isolation to inclusion when they find communities that accept and value giftedness without judgment.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Why is it difficult to acknowledge that a child is gifted?*

*How can adults help the child fit in, yet value, and be valued for, his differences?*

*How do you find out if a child is gifted?*

### **First Steps**

Use terminology appropriate to the knowledge levels of your audience and ascertain their attitude to giftedness so that you can assess how to approach key people who have an influence over the aspect of giftedness for which you are seeking support, whether that is school programming, counselling or family acceptance. Initially using alternatives such as 'special needs' or 'the need to work to ability' may be effective. Schools where staff are knowledgeable about the educational needs of gifted children will respond well to a portfolio of information about the child. They will appreciate any test results parents can provide and will be interested in negotiation for appropriate curriculum management and delivery for the gifted child.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Is 'gifted' a concept that is understood in your learning community?*

*What might the reaction be, and how can you deal with negative responses?*

*How do you know what a gifted child needs?*

### **Siblings**

It is generally recognised that siblings of identified gifted are usually also very able (within 10 IQ points). They are also often very different in nature and interests from the first-identified gifted child. Siblings need to be recognised as individuals with different needs. Comparison with the first-identified gifted child may be unproductive. It is also advisable to avoid the trap of communicating the same set of expectations to each sibling.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Do gifted children have gifted siblings and parents?*

*Are all gifted children similar?*

*Is giftedness **nature** or **nurture**?*

### **Myths**

Myths arise because although accurate information on giftedness is available it is not widely accessed. Other areas demand more attention because of the misconception that there are very few gifted children among us. As a result of inaccurate perceptions, *giftedness* is susceptible to stereotypes and myths are spread throughout the community. Parents cannot *make* a child gifted. Gifted children are not usually physically and emotionally undeveloped. Only in situations where they have no mental-age peers to relate to do they appear socially ill-adjusted. Their asynchrony (mental age well in advance of chronological age) means they are out-of-step and have special needs, particularly in education. Myths such as 'gifted children should be compliant high achievers' and 'gifted children need no special educational provisions' leave these children educationally disadvantaged. Gifted children should not be expected to complete regular class work before extension work is made available.

They remain the least understood and lowest funded special needs group in all educational settings. Absence of effective identification strategies in schools across the nation obscures the extent of giftedness among our population.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Why does giftedness attract prejudice?*

*Aren't **all** children gifted?*

*Can parents **make** their children gifted?*

### **Transitions**

#### *Acceleration*

In gifted education, acceleration means moving faster. Rather than extensive repetition for mastery of basics, gifted children need to proceed through their learning experiences at an individual pace. Acceleration includes strategies such as:

- curriculum acceleration within a year level
- curriculum compression or compaction
- subject acceleration
- grade or year skipping.

All of these may be needed for gifted children. Grade skipping alone can only serve as a temporary solution for a highly gifted child, and should be accompanied by extension in a differentiated curriculum. Successful acceleration depends on effective identification and

ongoing support. The receiving teacher must have positive attitudes towards giftedness be willing to help the child adjust to the new situation.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Do all gifted children need some form of acceleration?*

*What makes a good education for gifted students?*

*How do you choose the best school for your child?*

### **Networks**

Networks in gifted education reach across the globe and extend a helping hand to parents, teachers and community members interested in supporting the educational needs of the gifted. All states and territories in Australia have voluntary associations which are easily located, where information and support are readily and freely available. Activities for gifted children take place frequently, and conferences and seminars regularly inform adults about giftedness. It is valuable to search the web and choose from sites dedicated to gifted education to help find fulfilling pathways for gifted children.

Gifted children need networks that include friendships with *like minds*. Finding mental-age peers brings the relief of knowing it is all right to be interested in advanced learning. Self esteem and self efficacy are enhanced in gifted classes, clusters or streams.

Informed educators, as well as parents, have an important role to play in advocacy and lobbying to ensure a future for gifted children through awareness raising and information dissemination, as well as influencing government funding allocations. Teachers need to understand the parent's perspective and the motivation behind their advocacy role.

To be a successful advocate in schools, you will aim for a win-win outcome. For parents the first step is to understand the situation from the teacher's perspective and to take a proactive partnership approach, particularly when sharing information about a child. It may help to become known to the child's teacher as a positive influence on the child's education *before* a problem arises. It is also important to try to find ways in which you can give positive reinforcement and acknowledge the importance of the teacher. Teachers advocating for gifted education among colleagues and school administrators need to be well informed and have constructive ideas for putting their plans into practice across the school and its community.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*What are the rights of gifted children?*

*Who can I turn to for support and advice?*

*Where can I find information and resources about gifted education?*

### **Partnerships**

A successful partnership between school and home is fundamental to a satisfactory educational experience. Parents and teachers need to collaborate to ensure gifted children are understood and appreciated. Parents will be able to contribute their knowledge of the child to regular exchanges with teachers. Formal meetings with relevant school staff need careful planning and a regular agenda so that progress is made towards a negotiated, differentiated curriculum that includes extension, ability grouping and acceleration as

necessary. Parents can put their issues in writing as advance notice so that the school is prepared to address their concerns appropriately. Gifted children can contribute to the partnership by compiling information about their strengths and weaknesses to present to new teachers.

**Discussion Questions:**

*What strategies can help to ensure successful partnerships in educating the gifted?*

*Who needs to be involved for successful home-school negotiations?*

*How can parents and teachers improve how they work together to support gifted children?*

This project was supported by the Telstra Foundation [www.telstrafoundation.com](http://www.telstrafoundation.com)

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