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Gifted Children:

The Provision of Defensible Programs

in Queensland Schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of gifted education in Australia and overseas has often been met in the past with cries that providing programs for the gifted is elitist, undemocratic and wasteful. 'Many believe that gifted and talented children will invariably succeed on the basis of natural ability. Unfortunately, the evidence does not support this view.' (Select Committee, 1980, p.18)

Equal educational treatment of all children does not result in equal and fair education of children. Just as less able students should not be expected to work at the normative level, neither should advanced students

be asked to bide their time and limit their growth by working at a normative level. 'Each person has the right to learn and to be provided opportunities and challenges for learning at the most appropriate level where growth proceeds most efficiently.' (Clark, 1983, p. 132)

In Australia, gifted education has existed in various forms for decades. Opportunity classes in New South Wales provided separate provision for gifted children as early as the 1960s. Previously, in Queensland State Schools gifted children have been provided for within the regular classroom setting when the teacher recognised individual needs and as the teacher deemed was appropriate.

In terms of proactive policies, gifted education is well represented in all Australian states and territories. But policy statements, do not appropriately educate the gifted. Development and implementation of effective programs for the gifted must be initiated to provide appropriate education for these children. In Queensland, programming is the responsibility of the individual school with assistance available from regional consultants and the state consultancy director if desired.

The current Queensland policy statement for the education of the gifted in state schools provides an adequate road map for schools to move towards a comprehensive school program for gifted children. In addition to policy guidelines, special needs consultants have worked extensively in the last few years with school personnel to heighten awareness of the needs of gifted children and provide assistance with the development and implementation of appropriate programs.

The following document analysis was developed to ascertain to what extent the six year old policy has been effectively implemented at the school level, what organisational structures have proven appropriate and to identify further actions which may enhance efforts to educate gifted children in Queensland.

DESCRIPTION OF DOCUMENTS EXAMINED IN STUDY

Policy Statement no. 3, Education of the Gifted in Queensland State Schools, was published as a supplement to the Education Office Gazette on 22 February, 1985. The statement, though only three pages in length, succinctly provides a rationale for gifted education in Queensland, articulates departmental policy, and includes the definition of gifted children as adopted by the Queensland Department of Education. Also contained in the policy statement are sections which address identification of gifted children, principles underpinning decision making in the development of appropriate programs and structures, a framework for curriculum development and resource implications to be considered within program development.

The publication, *Initiatives for Gifted and Talented Children in Queensland Schools*, was released in the early months of 1990 to all state schools, tertiary institutions, and other interested organisations. The booklet is the compilation of information concerning programs for gifted children in Queensland. The central office, special needs consultant for gifted and talented education distributed a survey, through regional offices, to all state schools, units and centres requesting descriptions of programs which had been developed

for gifted children. A PIRS data entry sheet (Appendix A) provided a format for the requested information along with a descriptors section to assist in crossreferencing and organising the data received from respondents.

A draft document, outlining the stance of the Department of Education on the issue of social justice in education was also released in early 1990. In this draft no specific reference is made to gifted children by name. However, many of the concerns and principles in the document are mentioned frequently in the literature on gifted education. (Clark, 1983; Coleman, 1985; Fetterman, 1988; Gibson, 1990; Landvogt, 1991; Select Committee, 1980). For example, concerns such as the following are common: schooling disadvantages some while advantaging others; special provision must sometimes be made to enable certain groups to achieve equitable outcomes; policies on schooling and studies and curriculum development should incorporate principles of social justice. The development plan of the department, to encourage and enhance social justice in education, is outlined and includes key operating principles, implementation strategies, monitoring procedures, and review and reporting processes.

METHODOLOGY

Recent documents published by the Queensland Department of Education form the basis of data analysis for this study. Criteria outlined in Policy Statement no. 3 relating to identification procedures, curriculum development, organisational structures and personnel/resource utilisation were used to categorise, classify and analyse program data contained in the booklet, *Initiatives for Gifted and Talented Children in Queensland Schools*.

Firstly, the document was examined as a whole to consider the number of programs offered at the various school levels, the current status of the programs, the organisational structure of the programs, the content addressed by the programs, the target audience of the programs, grouping techniques as well as instructional settings/strategies used in the programs. Each program was classified in only one category for each of the above considerations with the exception of the information for instructional settings and strategies. All settings and strategies mentioned in a program description were included in the tabulation. Thus a

program which incorporates mentors, learning centres, resident camps and contracts was recorded under all four headings.

Secondly, criteria established from the policy statement were used to analyse the programs in terms of identification standards, principles utilised in development of provisions, and the degree to which programs exhibited a range of characteristics of defensible gifted curriculum as articulated in the policy statement. It must be pointed out that the structure of the survey did not emphasise inclusion of the school identification procedure which led to lack of adequate details in this area for some programs. In cases such as this, the researcher assumed that no identification procedure existed.

RESULTS

Of the 1072 primary schools, 172 secondary schools, 66 special education units and numerous centres surveyed, a total of 194 organisations (<15%) responded reporting 317 initiatives. Three of these reported initiatives were excluded due to the fact that they described programs which had already been listed by another school. Therefore 314 initiatives were classified according to the grade level of children being served by the programme.

Table 1 shows the number of programs offered by the various educational organisations. 158 (50.3%) of the reported programs focus on primary age children while 133(42.4%) of the programs operate at the secondary level. A further 23 programs (7.3%) operate across both primary and secondary levels.

TABLE 1

OFFERINGS OF GIFTED PROGRAMS IN QUEENSLAND SCHOOLS

	NUMBER OF ORGANISATIONS	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS OFFERED	
Primary Schools	115	153	
Secondary Schools	58	128	
Others: Includes	21	33*	

districts, centres,
regions, cluster
groups, areas

* Breakdown of Program Level

Primary 5	
Secondary only	5
Primary & Secondary	23

Total	33

At this point in the analysis, ten more programs were removed from the total number described in the initiatives booklet as they were not programs for children but rather described initiatives such as school policy, teacher/parent inservice presentations, the general philosophy of a program or a booklet developed for people acting as mentors for gifted children. For the purpose of the rest of this study then, only 304 of the original 317 initiatives were considered.

Table 2 reveals that as of 1990, 297 of the 304 programs for gifted children were active. Only seven were classified as inactive. Of these seven, one program was discontinued because of staff transfer, while another was a special program organised by the central office special needs consultant to run only once for a cluster group of six schools. The other five were initiated for individual children by the classroom teacher with assistance from consultants. Continuity was lost when the children involved in these five programs moved to a new class the proceeding year. Lack of a school wide policy on provision for gifted children and/or active support for such a provision by the whole school staff, both teaching and administrative, are factors which appear to have effected continuation of these programs.

TABLE 2

	Current Status of Program	
	Year Program Initiated	Program in 1990 Active
Inactive		
-	1977	1
		1978

1	-	
-	1979	-
-	1980	-
-	1981	-
-	1982	1
-	1983	-
-	1984	1
-	1985	7
-	1986	9
-	1987	8
-	1988	25
1	1989	67
6	1990	177
-		
	Total	297
7		

Table 3 describes the programs according to the type of content addressed by each. The four content areas most often found within the reported gifted programs were language, mathematics, science and social science. The results are not surprising as the majority of time within schools is spent on the study of these four areas. It is also worth noting that a

large proportion of the programs (58%) listed their target audience as high achievers, early finishers, or students identified as gifted, usually by teacher observation. (Refer to Table 4) Therefore it is easy to understand that if students are identified by academic achievement, programs designed for these students will reflect the content where they have demonstrated outstanding ability.

TABLE 3

Breakdown of Gifted Programs by Content Area

Content Area Programs	No. of
Language	149
Mathematics	135
Science	77
Social Sciences	46
Social Development	37
Theatre Arts	24
Sports	18
Thinking Skills	14
Art	7
Environmental Education	5
Study Skills	2
Career Education	2
Total	516*

*Total exceeds number of actual programs because of overlap of content areas within individual programs. For example, 75 programs are included under both language and mathematics and 55 of the science programs were also included in the mathematics total. In addition, overlaps exist between social science and language, and social science and mathematics.

It is heartening to note that Table 4 indicates the three most targeted audiences catered for by 59% of the programs are children who have been chosen/identified in some specific way to participate in the program. Programs such as these are more likely to be designed to meet individual needs of gifted children which is emphasised in the policy statement. The policy states,

The education of gifted children in Queensland State schools

is to be guided by a belief in the following principles:

- (a) the right of each individual to develop his/her potential;
- (b) the need for a school to be concerned with individual differences;
- (c) the right of each individual for equal opportunity to access education provisions;
and
- (d) the needs of society for the fully-developed talents of all.

The Department of Education subscribes to the basic notion of individuality, and encourages schools to provide programs that meet the specific needs of individuals and groups.

TABLE 4

Target Audience of Reported
Gifted Programs

Programs	No. of
Year level(s)/high achievement	89
Whole School/high achievement	48
Students identified as gifted	37
Whole school	33
Self nomination	32
Whole class/all participate	27
Early finishers	2
Combination	2
Not indicated	34
Total	304

The remaining information presented in Table 4 however is not as encouraging since it indicates that 126 programs constituting 41% of the total programs have target audiences of whole classes, whole schools or whoever would like to participate (self nomination) with a further 34 indicating no specific or intended audience. By creating programs in which all students participate, schools fail to identify the gifted and "meet the specific needs of individuals...".

TABLE 5

Grouping Technique(s) Used
Within Gifted Programs

	No. of Programs	
Small group instruction	83	
Individual/Independent	66	
Combination		54
Large group instruction	46	
Cluster grouping		13
Not indicated		42
Total		304

Examining Table 5, it can be seen that the types of grouping techniques most commonly used demonstrate an effort to individualise to some extent the programs for the children. Small group instruction and individual/independent work were the two most commonly reported grouping techniques employed, comprising 49% of all programs. Additionally, 28 of the 54 programs listed under the combination category were programs which used both small group and individual/independent instruction. With the inclusion of these programs together with the first two categories, over half (58%) of the programs appear to address individual needs through appropriate grouping techniques.

TABLE 6

Organisational Structure of Program

	No. of Programs
In class provision	121
Other: Out of school hours before/after school lunch time	74
Partial separation withdrawal	53
Combination	12
Separate provision	0
Acceleration	0
Not indicated	44
Total	304

It can easily be seen from Table 6 that there are three preferred program organisational structures. In-class provision, used by 121 (40%) of the programs, is the organisational structure presently being encouraged by Queensland regional and state offices. Partial separation (withdrawal) structures have lost favour in recent times largely due to the fact that there has been a push in the schools to address all student needs within the regular classroom setting. Therefore it is not surprising that only 53 (17%) of the programs incorporate partial separation as the organisational structure.

Programs utilising out of school hours, lunch time, or before/after school time account for 74 (24%) of the programs and thus do not differentiate the regular school curriculum. Over 90% of these programs take the form of a competition, camp, or field trip with 38 (51%) of the programs being provided at a secondary level.

The six organisational structures listed in Table 6 were outlined in Policy Statement no. 3 as possible structures which were appropriate for gifted programs. It is interesting to note then, that there are no gifted programs in Queensland which utilise a separate provision or acceleration structure to meet the needs of gifted children.

Dianne Rankin in her paper 'Refocussing Excellence within Equity: A Challenge for The 1990's' states,

Acceleration of gifted children should not be ignored. Acceleration can take the form of several strategies such as curriculum compaction, telescoping, early entry, subject acceleration and grade skipping. Research shows that even the most controversial of these, grade-skipping, has largely positive outcomes. (1990 p.3)

The consideration of acceleration as a means of meeting the needs of some gifted children is also encouraged by other writers but with the cautionary note that implementation of acceleration for a student should include a careful screening program and operate concurrently with a counselling program. Therefore in the development of future gifted programs, acceleration should be given greater considered as a viable organisational structure (Greenlaw and McIntosh, 1988; Landvogt, 1991; Van Tassell-Baska, 1986).

On the other hand, it is doubtful in the near future that gifted education will be able to shed the elitist label that some would give it. Consequently, at present the idea of utilising separate provision in an Australian gifted program seems to hold too many negative connotations to be seen as a workable organisational structure.

TABLE 7

Instructional Settings/Strategies
for Gifted Programs

Competitions		56
Mentors	54	
Contracts		51
Learning Centres		41
Peer tutoring		32

Resident Camps	29	
Field Trips		27
Computers		17
Clubs		16
Distance Education		6
Games	2	

Table 7 offers an overview of the various instructional strategies and settings used by gifted programs. A wide range of strategies is important when catering for the gifted, so that individual learning styles are provided for effectively. However only 27 programs (9%) could be considered to use a variety of strategies within any one particular program. Therefore it must be pointed out that although diversity exists across programs, it is lacking within the vast majority of them. As mentioned earlier in this paper, respondents to the survey were not specifically asked to delineate identification procedures used in their gifted program which resulted in 34 (11%) of the program descriptors containing no reference to the types of identification, if any, used by the program. A further 92 programs (30%) do not identify gifted children within the school population, but rather have all students in the school, all students at a particular year level(s), or any interested student participate in the gifted program. Table 8 then considered only 178 of the 304 reported programs.

TABLE 8

Identification Procedures
Used in Gifted Programs

Policy Statement of Criteria for Identification Program Programs	No of Programs Meeting Criteria	% Total
(N=178)		
Tap many sources of information	10	3.3 %

Use a variety of information - gathering techniques	5	1.6 %
Provide early and continued opportunities for identification %	6	2.0
Refers to identification of the hidden gifted	1	0.3 %

As evidenced in Table 8, very few of the 178 programs satisfied the criteria set down in the policy statement for a gifted identification program. It should be noted that only 13 programs were able to meet 1 or more of the criteria. That is, six programs satisfied one criteria, five programs were able to satisfy two of the policy statement criteria and two programs satisfied three of the criteria.

From the table it is obvious that very little is done in the described programs to identify the hidden gifted. The policy definition states that 'Gifted children are those who because of above average abilities, creativity and task commitment perform or are capable of performing at a high level in potentially valuable areas of human endeavour.' (Department of Education, 1985, p.1). Yet only one of the 304 programs mentions attempts to identify those capable of performing at a high level.

It is in the area of identification that programs most lack a comprehensive approach to the task. The policy states that the, '... identification process must operate concurrently with the development of appropriate programs and structures.' (Department of Education, 1985, p.2) This area, more than any other, needs to be developed to a far greater extent at the school level. It goes without saying that it is impossible to develop justifiable gifted programs if the audience for the program has not been adequately and accurately identified.

TABLE 9

Principles underpinning decision making to develop
appropriate provisions for the gifted

Principles identified in Policy Statement programs	No. of programs displaying principle	% of total
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Based on sound educational and psychological foundations	*	*
Not limited to within School personnel #	85	28
Opportunity for children 61 to interact with others of like mind	186	
No organisational structure of itself will cater for giftedness	*	*
Recognises the importance of continuity both within particular levels of schooling and across levels (at least 3 grades)	115	38
Is flexible and allows for 2 the movement of children into and out of programs	7	

* Not assessable from available data

A further analysis of personnel working within the gifted programs is provided in

Table 10.

Table 9 shows the number of programs displaying principles underpinning decision making in the development of appropriate provisions for the gifted as identified in Policy Statement no.3. More than half the programs, 186 (61%), provide gifted children the opportunity to meet with others of similar interests and abilities. Of the 186 programs 77(41%) were at a secondary level with the remaining 109(59%) organized for primary age children. This is commendable, however, many of these programs were camps, contests, Week of Excellence activities etc. and therefore failed to display another principle stated in the Policy No. 3 regarding "... continuity both within particular levels of schooling, and across levels...". These 'programs' maybe the beginnings of future gifted programs but at present are only isolated activities lacking continuity throughout the gifted child's school years. (Table 11 further describes the 115 programs which do provide some continuity across levels).

TABLE 10

Analysis of personnel and resources used in
programs from outside the school

Type of Personnel Resource Programs	Total	Primary	Secondary
Parents	5	-	5
Mentors 25*	14	15	
Competition 11*		5	7
Qld Dept of Education: 10* Consultants, Directors, Sec.Teachers working with primary children	8	4	
Local and Wider community: 32* Community members/ resources, guest artists, experts in the field, published writers, environmentalists, guest speakers, camps	13	20	
Tertiary institutions	2	4	6

* Some programs operate across primary and secondary schools and have been counted under both categories. Therefore total is less than the sum of programs indicated under primary and secondary.

Table 10 reveals that the community and mentor categories of personnel resources are the most widely used by gifted programs. However the other four types of personnel resources, parents, competition organisers, Department of Education consultants and faculties of tertiary institutions are tapped by a relatively small percentage of the programs. All four types of personnel are easily accessible to a large number of schools and should be utilised to a greater extent. Hopefully the sharing of information through the initiatives booklet has already effected a positive change in this regard.

TABLE 11

Programs providing continuity across three (3)
or more levels classified according to level

of	No. of Programs		%
Total Prog.			
Primary (N = 153)			
45			
All levels	41		
Lower levels		4	
Upper levels	24		
Secondary (N = 128)			
26			
All levels	22		
Junior secondary levels	10		
Levels 8-11	1		
Levels 10-12	1		
Primary and Secondary (N = 23)			
52			
All levels P-12	1		
Levels 1-10		5	
Upper primary/ lower secondary levels	5		
upper primary/ all secondary		1	

Table 11 provides a breakdown of the 115 schools noted in Table 9 as satisfying the principle, '...recognises the importance of continuity both within particular levels of schooling and across levels...' An encouraging 45% of primary programs and 52% of primary/secondary programs provide continuity across three (3) or more year levels. However the majority of

secondary programs (74%) were unable to demonstrate the characteristic of continuity.

TABLE 12

Programs classified according to Characteristics
of a defensible curriculum

Characteristics as presented in Policy Statement No. 3 characteristic	Total	No. of Programs demonstrating		
		Primary	Secondary	Pri/Sec
"Concentration on high level skills"	211	117	87	7
"Emphasis on problem identification and problem solving/ thinking skills"	122	73	45	4
"Provision for the opportunity for quick mastery of the basic skills/compaction of the curriculum"	11	4	6	1
"Future orientation"	5	-	4	1
"A study of the structure of the discipline"	9	3	-	6

Policy Statement no. 3 identified five curriculum characteristics which

should be included in a defensible program for the gifted. Table 12 indicates the number of programs at the various levels which exhibited these characteristics. Only two characteristics were evidenced in over a third of the programs. Two hundred and eleven of the programs (69%), concentrated on high level skills with 122 (40%) emphasising problem solving skills. The remaining three characteristics were only displayed by an extremely small number of programs.

In considering the characteristics listed in Table 12, it becomes obvious that evidence of most or all of these characteristics is desirable in a gifted program. Therefore Table 13 indicates the number of characteristics contained within a program. No programs demonstrated all five (5) or even four (4) of the characteristics listed in the policy statement. Only 9 programs (3%) demonstrated three (3) characteristics leaving the remaining 295 displaying two or less of the five characteristics.

TABLE 13

Policy Statement Criteria displayed by programs

No. of Criteria of Total Programs	No. of Programs displaying Characteristic(s)	%
All 5	-	-
4	-	-
3 3	9	
2	95	31
1	130	43
0	70	29

It is this last table which reveals there is still much to be done toward (s) the development of defensible gifted programs in Queensland. As new programs are conceived and existing programs refined, program designers should work to incorporate these five characteristics in the program as well as provide adequate identification procedures and provision for continuance of programs throughout gifted children's school careers.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

1. Slightly less than 15% of Queensland state schools (194 out of 1310) reported some type of gifted program during a 1990 survey of all state schools.
2. The seven programs which have become inactive might have continued had there existed a school wide curriculum plan for gifted students.
3. A large proportion (58%) of the programs contain language, mathematics, science and/or social science content which coincides with the emphasis found in the content of the regular classroom curriculum.
4. Although 59% of the programs make an attempt to identify gifted children and meet their specific needs, there still remains 126 programs (46%) which cater for everyone in the school or everyone at a particular grade level(s) or anyone who is interested.
5. 40% of the programs utilise the in-class provision which is currently preferred by the Queensland Department of Education. Partial separation (withdrawal) structures account for a further 17% of the program provision types.
6. None of the reported gifted programs in Queensland utilise a separate provision or accelerated structure to meet the needs of gifted children.
7. Over half (58%) of the programs appear to address individual needs through appropriate grouping techniques such as small group instruction and

individual/independent work.

8. 74 (24%) of the 304 programs operate outside school hours and thus do little to differentiate the school curriculum offered to gifted children during school time.

9. Although diversity of instructional strategies/settings may be found across programs, the diversity is absent within the vast majority of individual programs.

10. Only 13 (4%) of the programs were able to satisfy one or more of the criteria for a gifted identification program as set down in the policy statement. Only one of the 304 programs mentioned attempts to identify the hidden gifted who are capable of performing at a high level but do not demonstrate their capabilities.

11. Members of the local and wider community are the most typical type of personnel resource used in addition to the school staff. Parents, competition organisers, Department of Education consultants and faculties of tertiary institutions remain a virtually untapped source of personnel resources for gifted programs.

12. 44% of primary programs provide continuity of services across three or more year levels. However, only 26% of secondary school programs demonstrated this continuity characteristic.

13. No program was able to demonstrate all five or even four of the characteristics which the policy statement indicates should be included in a defensible program for the gifted.

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