

THE ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCE

**REPORT OF THE REVIEW
OF GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION
IN
QUEENSLAND STATE SCHOOLS
TOWARDS 2010**

Summary of Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
1. Purpose, Objectives and Methodology of the Review	1
2. Background to the Review	4
3. Review of the Focus Schools - School Visits	15
4. Evaluation of the Focus Schools as a Component of the GATE Initiative	51
5. Evaluation of the Focus School Component of the GATE Initiative	67
6. The Focus Schools - Issues and Lessons	77
7. Directions: “If we handicap the gifted, we handicap the future!”	79
8. Action Proposals in making the gifted Core Business	90
9. References	98

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Education Queensland - Emerald District Office

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Ms Maggie Shalhoub, G&T Coordinator

Staff
Parents
Students

Denison State School

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Ms Felicity Bezer, Enrichment Coordinator
Ms Kathy Sheppard, Enrichment Coordinator

Staff
Parents
Students

Eagle Junction State School

Mr Ken Falvey, Principal
Ms Liz Campbell, Enrichment Coordinator

Staff
Parents
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Mackay North State High School

Ms Linda Boyle, Principal
Ms Tricia Becker, Enrichment Coordinator

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Nambour State School

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Parents
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Robertson State School

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Ms Chris Dyer, Maleny State Primary School
Ms Janne McCowan, Principal, Blackwater North State School
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Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children, Inc

Ms Judith Hewton, President
Dr James Watters, Vice-President
Ms Patricia Burgess, Executive Member
Ms Jennifer Riggs, Member

Additional

Dr Bruce Knight, Head, Faculty of Education and Creative Arts, CQU
Mr Stuart Watt, Warwick State High School
Ms Lydia Balzatt, Year 11 student

Follow-up Emails from parents interviewed during Focus School visits

ABOUT THE REVIEWER ~

Ken Imison

B.A.(Hon), Sydney, M.Ed(Hons) Sydney, T.C., ALAM (LAMDA)

Born in Sydney, Ken Imison was identified as gifted and placed in an Opportunity C Class for gifted students for the last two years of primary. He followed his chosen career path of becoming a Primary school teacher and taught in primary schools in NSW and in London for sixteen years. Eight of those years were spent teaching Opportunity C classes for gifted students. During this time he completed his BA with Honours in Education and his Honours thesis was, "Curriculum Enrichment for the Gifted".

In 1969 Mr Imison became a Lecturer in Education at Mitchell College of Advanced Education, Bathurst. He completed a Master's degree in Education with Honours and his Honours thesis was, "Cognitive Flexibility: A Critical factor in Teacher Effectiveness". In 1974 he was awarded the Imperial Relations Trust Fellowship to study in London but declined the award in order to accept an appointment in 1975 as Head of Curriculum and Instruction and Chairman of the School of Education at Darlings Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Toowoomba. In 1979 he was appointed to the newly created position of Dean of Education at that institute and remained in that position until June 1988 when he retired from tertiary education in order to establish his own consultancy and testing centre, S.O.I. (Australia). The major focus of the centre is testing and identifying gifted students.

While Dean, Mr Imison developed and taught a two semester strand in Gifted education offered a part of the Graduate Diploma in Teaching (Exceptional Children). This was the first external study to be offered externally for teachers. He is a member of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children and served as a member of that organisation's Executive Committee and as an Australian Delegate to its Assembly.

He was the co-founder of the Australian Association for the Gifted and Talented and was the foundation President of that Association for four years. He has been awarded a Life Membership to that Association. While he was President, the Association hosted in Sydney the 8th World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children. He has presented papers at state, national and international conferences on the Gifted and is presently writing a book on giftedness.

Mr Imison was also the Chairman of the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, a position he held from the time the Board was created in 1989 until January, 2001.

1. Purpose, Objectives and Methodology of the Review

The **Purpose** of this Review as stated in the Consultancy Agreement is: “to provide advice and directions for gifted and talented (G&T) education in Queensland following the adoption of the *Queensland State Education - 2010* and related strategic directions”.

The **Objectives** for the Review were:

- * Review and evaluate, in terms of outcomes and outputs, the present Focus Schools approach to provision of, and furthering professional development in, gifted and talented education;
- * Provide advice regarding an appropriate mix of strategies so that quality gifted and talented education is available in all Queensland state schools; and
- * Provide advice regarding the integration of other current programs relating to gifted and talented students (such as MOST, Fanfare, and Minister’s Art Awards) into a G&T framework.

Methodology used:

◆ Data collection from relevant sections of Education Queensland.

Data was collected through documents and through discussions as appropriate and as necessary. The data provided information on:

- historical perspective on provisions for gifted and talented students;
- policies on gifted and talented education;
- resourcing of gifted and talented education.
- relevant Education Queensland programs such as the New Basics, MOST, Fanfare, Minister’s Art Awards, Young Conservatorium, Science Summer School Program;
- other key documents such as Strategic Plan 2000-2004;
- previous reports on Unicorn and the GATE Initiative.

◆ Visits to Focus Schools

Each of the seven focus schools was visited for the purpose of data collection

- from these schools,
- from schools supported by Focus Schools, and
- from parents.

Prior to the visits, I participated in a teleconference with the Enrichment Coordinators and a number of principals from Focus Schools. This teleconference was organised by Ms Jo Diessel, Director, Teaching and Learning Branch, Education Queensland. This meeting provided me with the opportunity to indicate the need to meet with the Enrichment Coordinators and Principals, with staff, parents and students from the Focus School and to either visit network schools or to talk with the Principals of these schools.

Following this teleconference, each Focus School was sent by email information about the materials I needed and the questions which were in my mind as I read background information about the Focus Schools.

The program for the school visits was then organised. This organisation required visits to accommodate particular school factors as well as my own professional commitments outside the

review. Unfortunately Easter and the school vacation meant that I could not complete the program of visits before Easter as I had originally intended.

Schools were visited as follows:

14th, 15th March -	Robertson State School
20th, 21st March -	Eagle Junction State School
27th, 28th March -	Townsville State High School
29th, 30th March -	Mackay North State High School
3rd, 4th April	- Nambour State School
5th, 6th April	- Caloundra State High School
26th, 27th April -	Denison State School

3. Other Sources

I attended the Annual Conference of the Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children, Inc. on 24th, 25th and 26th March. The Conference Organisers organised a table for me in the main meeting area of the conference and this gave me the opportunity to meet with parents and teachers who wanted to express views about gifted education. Unfortunately it was not possible during the conference to meet with the Executive of the Queensland Association and other commitments prevented my being able to meet with the Executive in person at a later date. However, the Association's submission to the Senate Committee inquiring into Gifted education proved most useful in detailing the Association's views on a number of areas of particular interest to this review. In addition, a written response was provided by the Executive.

Following the QAGTC Conference, a number of emails were received with comments from parents and from one teacher who had spoken to me at the Conference.

An additional school visit was made to Petrie Terrace State School. This school had a display at the Conference outlining aspects of the provisions they were making for gifted students and this together with discussions with a parent from that school indicated that a visit could be of value.

4. Questionnaire

From early briefing discussions on the review, it was indicated that this was not intended to be a major review in the sense of involving travel throughout Queensland in order to gather materials and information. However it was suggested that a questionnaire surveying what was being done in schools might be useful. While initially this appeared an attractive source of data, such a survey instrument presented a number of problems:

- ◆ The time limitations imposed upon this review were such that any survey of schools would have to utilise some form of sampling in order to reduce the numbers of schools to a manageable size in terms of mailing, receipt of responses and the analysis of data. My concern was that any sampling was likely to miss some schools where interesting provisions for the gifted were in place. If any of these were schools where there was already a sense of having missed out on funding because of the Focus Schools, this could serve to deepen their sense of being overlooked. Such a situation had the potential to create adverse reactions to the report.
- ◆ Even if I discounted the issues indicated in the previous section, I was then faced with the difficulty of writing questions or statements which would evoke meaningful responses from which I could determine what was happening in schools in terms of providing for the gifted. Previous experiences with such survey instruments had indicated that there was a problem in separating out responses which were accurate statements of attitudes and practices and with responses which were according to what the respondent thought were desired responses. This can only adequately be resolved by introducing a process for validating responses to ensure that the responses gave insights into what really was happening rather than what would present a more positive picture of a school's activities. Unfortunately, validation of a sample of responses would have required visits to those schools but unfortunately the time frame for the review did not permit such a validation step to be set in place.

The question underlying these concerns was: to what extent would I gain new information from this questionnaire? My professional work had not suggested that there were any significant changes in the state-wide picture of provisions for the gifted. Nor did my discussions with key personnel in Education Queensland indicate that changes had taken

place. Further the need for a review which was to examine an appropriate mix of strategies so that quality gifted and talented education is available in all Queensland state schools suggested that the picture was still likely to show the range would be from no meaningful provisions through to schools provided extensively for gifted students.

In light of the above issues, I chose not to pursue the idea of a survey of schools and what I have learned in the course of this review has justified that decision.

2. Background to the Review

This review must be placed in an historical context of gifted education in Queensland.

Progressing by small steps

Prior to the late 1970's, interest in the gifted throughout the states of Australia varied greatly. In **NSW** the provision of special full-time classes for gifted students in the final two years of primary schooling had been maintained despite occasional efforts to dispense with them. These classes, known as O.C. or Opportunity Classes, had been established in 1932 and have remained a major component of NSW provisions for the gifted with the original number expanded so that students in the non-metropolitan areas were more able to access these provisions. Selective High schools continued to function.

Western Australia was developing further the development of selected schools for students excelling in specific subject areas while in **Victoria** the growing awareness of the needs of gifted students was to lead to the establishment of the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children and then in 1976, to the setting up of a Task Force to examine gifted education. In **South Australia**, the first half of the 1970's was dominated by major changes in school structures, administration and curriculum. A major feature was the introduction of innovations such as open-plan classrooms, family groupings and cooperative teaching. In this development, the concept of Adaptive Education emerged emphasising the need for schools to cater more adequately for a wider range of abilities. In this period of major change, the needs of gifted students received little attention.

In **Tasmania**, there was no recognition of gifted students having special needs and this seemed to be more related to the educational system's commitment to an egalitarian view in which education was for social purposes. The situation in the **Northern Territory** was summed up by Braggett in the following statement: "*As a result of such geographic, demographic and administrative conditions in the Northern Territory, there was a strong egalitarian movement during the 1970's, one in which the cause of gifted and talented children did not rank highly.*" (Braggett, 1985, p.176)

In the **Australian Capital Territory**, although the educational system was undergoing major changes, little attention was given to gifted education. Braggett reports that when the Interim Schools Authority was asked by the Australian Education Council to provide information about the types of provisions for the gifted, the brief reply stated that there were "*no specific system-provision for the education of gifted children in the government preschools, primary and secondary schools*". (Braggett, 1985, p.197) As with South Australia, the ACT had embraced open-plan classrooms where it was believed that the focus on the individual student would adequately provide for gifted students.

In **Queensland**, a major educational change was the implementation of the Radford Report which had recommended the introduction of a school-based assessment system to replace the external Junior and Senior Examinations in secondary school. There was no specific policy on the education of the gifted at this time and provisions for the gifted throughout the state were localised to particular schools and even to particular classrooms. Interestingly enough, one localised provision was established in 1975 and this took the form of a special class for gifted children at Gabbinbar State School, Toowoomba. This was a family grouping or multi-age class with students from Years 1-7 being identified as gifted on the basis of teacher nomination and an assessment of intellectual functioning by a Regional Guidance Officer. The program of the special class was one which emphasised thinking abilities, skills for independent learning and a Language program which provided students with an introduction to German, Indonesian and Esperanto! This special grouping was to remain in operation until 1981 when staff changes made the special class more difficult to sustain. The class was abandoned and was followed by a short and unsuccessful attempt to replace it with a partial withdrawal program for gifted students. Throughout its existence, the special class was regarded as a radical provision rather than a model for other schools to adopt. While a special class such as this was generally rejected on grounds which related more to the belief systems of critics rather than to any empirical evidence, this class has to be seen in the context which made it possible. Gabbinbar was a new school with teaching areas designed for innovative practices such as open-area teaching and with students drawn from a population which was more professionally oriented and with some students whose histories in their former schools suggested behavioural or social or psychological problems. Added to this was a school Principal who was passionate in his educational beliefs but who challenged more conservative principals less willing to be innovators. It also had strong professional links with the School of Education at the then Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education. While there were several factors which enabled the special class to be established, a key factor in its demise was the lack of staff support for it.

Although the staff had participated in what were at times stormy discussions about the need for a class for gifted students, the decision was made by the Principal, Mr Colin Crain, who was to become a member of the Department's Standing Committee on gifted education and later, the Treasurer for the Australian Association for the Gifted and Talented. Lack of commitment to the decision by many of the staff and negative attitudes many

held resulted in the students in the special class finding themselves isolated from the rest of the school, an isolation compounded by numerous room changes culminating in the class being provided with a room in the Preschool and not in the main cluster of buildings which make up the Primary School.

It is important to note that despite these problems, most of the students who were to experience the special class program were to regard it as a highlight of their education.

The Gabbinbar experiment provided important lessons for those seeking to introduce innovative approaches especially in terms of providing for the gifted.

It was in the second half of the 1970's and in the early 1980's that important developments took place. A dramatic development at the international level had been the founding in 1975 of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children. The new World Council decided to hold an international conference biennially and by 1979, a number of Australians were participating in these conferences. The involvement of Australians in the first conference at which the Council was founded was to result in an Australian being elected to the Executive Committee of the World Council and for this representation to remain almost constant over the decades since. This was a time when more Associations for Gifted and Talented Children were being established around Australia, some of which were State Associations. In Queensland what began as the North Brisbane Association for Gifted and Talented Children soon became the Queensland Association with a number of local Associations being absorbed into the larger state association as branches.

In 1983, the World Conference was held in Manila and shortly after, the First National Conference on Gifted and Talented Children was held in Melbourne with financial support from the Commonwealth. Australian delegates at the World Conference had been concerned when a major presentation of an overview of gifted education throughout the world used information which was obtained from the NSW Department of Education. This gave a very inaccurate impression of what was happening in states other than NSW. The Australian delegates considered that this problem was created because there was no identifiable centre for that could be contacted by people from other countries seeking information about gifted education in Australia. As a result of the concerns expressed to the National conference about the incorrect and quite distorted view of Australia's provisions for gifted students, a plenary session at the end of the conference asked a two person committee comprising of Dr Eddie Braggett and myself to examine several areas for development, one of which was the possibility of a national association. A second national conference was held in Brisbane in May, 1985 and at that conference, I presented a structure for a national association and this was overwhelmingly endorsed. In this way, on 17th May, 1985, the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented was founded.

In the second half of the 1980's, the national and state associations strengthened in memberships and activities. State and national conferences provided opportunities for teachers and parents to share experiences and developments and to hear major presentations, some of which were by major international figures in gifted education. In schools, there was increased interest in gifted students and increased exploration of ways of meeting their needs. A major feature was in 1989 when the Australian Association hosted in Sydney the 8th World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children. This proved invaluable for teachers especially with the opportunity to be exposed to the views of many of the leading experts in the field.

At the Queensland State level, gifted education had received attention in the Final Report of what was referred to as the Ahern Report. In 1978, the Queensland Government had established a committee chaired by Mike Ahern MP to "inquire into, report upon, and make recommendations in relation to the system of education in Queensland and the extent to which it meets the expectations of students, parents, and the community." (*Legislative Assembly, 4 April, 1978*) The report was an important one for gifted education because it states:

Whilst the systematic effort is being made to upgrade the provision of education for the physically and intellectually handicapped, a number of people have expressed their concern that there appears to be no systematic provision for the needs of exceptionally gifted and talented children. Many people have believed, and indeed still believe, that gifted and talented children will invariably succeed on the basis of natural ability. Unfortunately the evidence we have examined does not support this view. (Select Committee, 1980, p.18)

One of its recommendations was:

That the Minister appoint an advisory committee which should include members from outside the Department, with special knowledge in the area, to advise him on the education of gifted and talented children in Queensland. (Select Committee, 1980, p.26)

There was a prompt response to this recommendation but not as was intended. Instead of a Standing Committee advising the Minister, the department of Education established a Working Party with members drawn from within the system. This was later replaced by the Director-General with a new committee with membership drawn from

senior levels within the State system. The essential task of this committee was to consider provisions for gifted and talented children in Queensland State Schools. In 1983, this committee produced a report which responded to another of the Select Committee's recommendations:

That the Department of Education, in consultation with other educational authorities, develops the necessary definitions and procedures to enable gifted and talented students to be identified, and their teachers made aware of their special gifts so that they may provide appropriate individualized instruction (Select Committee, 1980, p.26)

This report contained a Policy Statement on Educational provisions for Gifted Children.

While in 1985 and 1986, the Departmental Standing Committee, as it had now become, conducted two workshops on gifted education, it was not until 1989 that a major step was taken by the Department of Education. Twelve regional consultants in gifted education were appointed together with and working with a state coordinator.. The consultants underwent several periods of training and then each worked in a region providing professional development workshops and seminars for teachers and for parents. This was a period when the emphasis was on enrichment activities largely offered in the regular classroom or in pull-out programs where students were withdrawn for enrichment. These pull-out programs varied greatly from school to school in terms of the length of time of the enrichment sessions, their frequency during the week, the content of the enrichment program, the ways in which students were selected for the activities and the expertise of the teachers providing the enrichment activities.. Further the enrichment programs were more the initiative of individual teachers rather than being a whole-school initiative.

During this period of the consultants in gifted education, there was much activity in terms of professional development programs provided by or organised by the gifted consultants and in terms of activities being provided for gifted students. However the quality of what was being offered by teachers was varied and at times, teacher enthusiasm was not matched by an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding. Of course, the provision of enrichment activities/programs was predominantly to be found in primary schools where the structures for learning made it easier for enrichment to be provided.

The enthusiastic team of consultants provided much needed support and stimulus as equally enthusiastic teachers endeavoured to put in place enrichment provisions in their classrooms. The extent to which these teachers were able to influence their schools was dependent on the attitudes of principals and other staff and in some situations, it was dependent on the attitude of the school community in terms of providing for gifted students.

However by late 1990, proposed changes to the regional structure of the Department of Education were viewed with alarm by the Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children and their concerns were expressed in the President's Report in the Association's October Journal:

Our concern is that emphasis on disadvantaged groups in the community may not encompass the special needs of the gifted and talented. We need to alert those who are developing these policies that the specific needs of all gifted and talented children must be addressed if these students are not to be disadvantaged within the system. At the same time it must be recognised that students' gender, social, economic or cultural backgrounds should not be a limiting factor in their development, and any moves to overcome discrimination or lack of opportunity because of these factors will be supported.

There remains in the community an attitude that gifted and talented students are already an advantaged group and do not need special attention or resources.

The experiences of this association is that there are children from a wide range of backgrounds whose potential will not be developed unless they have access to curriculum and organisational strategies which meet their special needs. We would hope that this will be recognised so that no student is disadvantaged. (QAGTC Journal, Vol 12-No 2, October 1990, p.3)

Although the consultant positions continued in 1991, it was evident that their future remained uncertain. In the August 1992 edition of the Queensland Association's Journal, the President commented on the changes which had been announced:

As I reported in the May journal, each Education Department Region has an Educational Advisor on gifted and talented children in 1992. This has been the situation from 1989 to 1991 except the name: they were previously called consultants. In 1993, Gifted and Talented Advisors will ONLY be appointed to a region if the schools within the region see this as a need area. Many of our schools throughout the state still do not recognise that they have gifted

children let alone know that they need assistance if they are to cater for them in appropriate ways. I feel many educators and parents think gifted = MENSA. That is, the intellectually gifted at the top 2% of the population. As gifted covers 25% to 30% of children we are not looking at a small minority group but a very large group of children with needs that, in the main, are not being met.

Therefore, if we are to have G&T educational advisors in 1993, we as parents and teachers need to make the needs of gifted children known to our school principals, and the support centre coordinators. It is the support centres who decide on the advisors according to the needs expressed by the schools in their area. The Education Department seems to be looking at advisors who are 'multi talented' for the future. This may be a bonus to the Education department as theoretically they can cover more than one area, but as far as QAGTC is concerned this is not really suitable for G&T as they will not have the depth of knowledge essential to work with gifted children. They may not have any real knowledge of giftedness and there is certainly no-one in the education department allocated to training advisors or teachers on giftedness now. The current Educational Advisors run professional development days, usually one per term, for the contact teachers for G&T in each school in their region. (QGTC Journal, Vol 13-No 1, August 1992, pp 4-5)

While the reference to giftedness as covering 25 to 30% is a very broad view of giftedness not commonly accepted now, the points were important ones in that one factor in the failure of schools to make appropriate provisions for gifted students has been the misconception that giftedness is synonymous with genius. Such a view is convenient because it enables principals and teachers to claim with some justification that they have no gifted children in their school or class. Thus by definition, the problem is removed!

In December of 1992, the Newsletter of the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented carried a report from its Queensland Representative, a section of which stated:

The picture in the Department of Education is not so rosy. In 1993 our statewide network of consultants will no longer exist. Consultants, or educational advisors, as they are now called, are put in place based on needs assessment in clusters of schools. As curriculum areas usually are a teacher's first concern, Gifted and Talented consultants have not been re-elected at cluster level. This area is no longer a state priority and consequently we will be fortunate to retain one full-time regional Education Advisor in this state.

What is occurring in Queensland is an emphasis on inclusive curriculum and a supportive school environment. Under these umbrellas gifted education will keep tenuous links with schools. It is to be hoped that the excellent advances made in the last four years will be strong enough to support these children in our schools by continuing teacher networks, days of excellence and model school programs. (AAEGT Newsletter, Vol 7-No 3, December 1992, p.38).

In providing regions with their priority needs for support from educational advisors, schools had overwhelmingly chosen areas other than the education of gifted students. This highlights several major issues:

- ◆ While the work of the G&T consultants had done much to inform, to inspire and to support teachers, there were few places where gifted education was embraced as a whole-school approach. Instead, the major recipients of this valuable professional development were individual teachers who were at the best able to share their commitment to the gifted with some other staff and at the worst, worked alone, with little support and in some cases, in a climate of antagonism. In these circumstances, gifted provisions were very vulnerable to staff changes so that there was little continuity of provisions in schools where enthusiastic teachers had attempted to offer gifted students some form of enrichment.

This also meant that as a gifted child progressed from class to class, enrichment was not a guaranteed provision. At times, the change meant that the student moved from a class in which enrichment was provided to one in which there was an inflexible lock-step progression through the year's program with no recognition being given to critical differences in the speed of learning and the style of learning of gifted students.

It is not surprising then to find that schools considered they had priorities other than the education of the gifted. The real impact of the consultants had been on those who either were already enthusiastic advocates for gifted students or who were interested enough to want to know how to provide for these students. Little impact would appear to have been made on those who placed little or no value on the education of the gifted. Many of these teachers and indeed principals had little or no knowledge and understanding of giftedness and were more likely to hold stereotypic views of which the following are but examples:

- *Special provisions for the gifted are elitist.*
 - *It is wrong to provide any more for the gifted since they already have more than others.*
 - *Gifted children will survive without special program whereas others won't.*
 - *Gifted children must work in mixed-ability groups/classes because so that they will develop an understanding of their less able peers.*
 - *Gifted children must remain in mixed ability groups/classes because they provide a stimulus to the others and a model for the less able.*
 - *If gifted children are provided with any special program in the regular classroom, they will become isolates.*
 - *Gifted children who are accelerated into higher grades often experience problems in their later years of schooling.*
 - *Gifted children must not be made to feel different.*
 - *A child cannot be gifted and have learning problems.*
 - *Gifted children are often socially immature.*
- ◆ Where educational funding is provided for a specific purpose such as the education of the gifted and then withdrawn after a relatively short period, then the message given is that this is not after all a priority area and that other areas must be of greater importance. Of course, this message had been implicit well before 1992 because within two years of the creation of the educational consultant positions, there had been uncertainties about future funding. It was not surprising that other areas were to emerge as school priorities, given the messages implicit in funding and organisational changes and given the lack of a system-wide commitment to gifted education.
- ◆ It is important to place the changes to the consultant positions and the decisions made at regional level within another context. It was in this same period that major changes were occurring in the provisions for students with special needs because of learning problems or physical and/or intellectual problems adversely affecting their education. Special schools were changing so that that many of the students who would formerly have been placed in Special Schools were now placed in mainstreamed situations while students with more significant problems were being placed in the Special Schools. These changes meant that teachers were now having to provide appropriate learning experiences for much greater range of abilities yet had little or no training in Special Education. Many teachers were now having to cope with marked extremes in ability. It was - and is - understandable that in these situations, the demands of providing for children requiring greater support to master smaller steps in learning left teachers with little time to provide for those who seemed to be learning more effectively and efficiently.

These new demands on the time and skills of teachers had clearly become a priority for schools and teachers and at the expense of the gifted.

In 1993, a new policy, *The Education of Gifted Students in Queensland Schools*, was released. This had been developed through a process of intersystemic consultation with schools, regional personnel, community and tertiary education representatives. It is interesting to note that the report used the term, "gifted" rather than "gifted and talented" and this will be subject to further comment in a later section of this report. While this new policy was an important document, it was to have little impact on schools largely because it was difficult to consider gifted education to be a priority either in the day-to-day life of schools and of teachers or in the views of senior officers with the system, views which were to be inferred from decisions rather than from explicit statements.

In this same year, the Zigzag Project was funded by the National Equity Program for Schools; Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training. This was the first of three projects funded by the Commonwealth and was conducted in 1993-1994. A second project was the Cygnet Project conducted in the Northern Region while the third was the Unicorn project which was funded from 1995-1996. These projects were specific in nature in that they were all projects involving a small number of school and all were providing for gifted students who were more likely to be underachievers who were to be found in the disadvantaged groups targeted by the Commonwealth for funding. These were: --

- students with disabilities;
- students from low socio-economic backgrounds;
- students with low English proficiency;
- students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

These projects were intersystemic and when the Commonwealth funding ceased for the Unicorn project at the end of 1996, Unicorn was continued as a joint project between Education Queensland and The Association of Independent Schools of Queensland. The emphasis of this continuing project was on three areas of gifted education: curriculum provision, identification strategies and staff development.

All three projects through the professional development activities offered to teachers other than from the schools participating in the projects provided the foundation for the later development of the Focus Schools. Detailed reports on the Unicorn Project which ended in 2000 are held in Education Queensland.

The Focus Schools

When the then Minister for Education, the Honourable Bob Quinn, allocated \$1 million for gifted and talented education, the Department of Education established the GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) in 1997. The original initiative was to have three components:

- ◆ Focus Schools
- ◆ School grants
- ◆ Publicity.

Focus schools were to be “*whole-school centres for training, research and visitation*” (1998 Report, p.1) and in the first phase of the initiative, four Focus Schools were to be established in 1997. In 1998 a second phase of another four Focus Schools were to be identified. The aim of this project was:

To enhance school curriculum responses to the needs of students, particularly students with gifts and talents, using Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) strategies in schools through:

- *GATE curriculum planning and delivery*
- *GATE teaching strategies and identification processes*
- *classroom and school organisations which facilitates flexible progressions (Gifted and Talented Project, undated, p.1)*

The Focus Schools were to receive 0.5 Enrichment Coordinator, some funds in the form of Grants to enable the GATE strategies stated above to be developed and implemented and to enable the Focus Schools to develop OUTREACH programs to assist other schools to make better provisions for gifted students.

The second component of the GATE initiative was the allocation of funds to District Offices. These funds were to be available in the form of grants to schools wishing to embark on specific small-scale projects in gifted education.

The third component was a publicity one in which it was intended to “*raise awareness and implementing public relation strategies*” (Gifted and Talented Project, undated, p.4) Of the three components of the GATE initiatives, only that of the Focus schools has been maintained. This is reflected in the budget Allocations for the GATE initiative:

1998-1999

1.	<u>Focus Schools</u>			
	Salaries	\$180,000		
	Grants	\$137,000		
	Outreach extension	\$50,000	Total	\$367,000
2.	<u>Grants to Districts</u>	\$400,000	Total	\$400,000
3.	<u>Central Office Support</u>			
	Project officers (2.5)	\$130,000		
	Travel, Administration, Resources and TRS	\$38,000	Total	\$168,000
				<u>TOTAL:</u> <u>\$935,000</u>

1999-2000

1.	<u>Focus Schools</u>			
	Salaries	\$330,000		
	Grants	\$150,000	Total	\$480,000
2.	<u>Grants for Districts</u>	\$360,000	Total	\$360,000
3.	<u>Central Office Support</u>			
	Project Officer	\$65,000		
	Travel, Administration, Resources and TRS	\$30,000	Total	\$95,000
				<u>TOTAL</u> \$935,000

2000 - 2001

1.	<u>Focus Schools</u>			
	Salaries	\$426,000		
	Grants	\$87,000	Total	\$513,000
2.	<u>Joint AISQ/EQ Project</u>			
	Salary July 2000-Jan 2001	\$35,000	Total	\$35,000
3.	<u>Advanced Extension Awards</u>	\$40,000	Total	\$40,000
4.	<u>Young Conservatorium</u>	\$100,000	Total	\$100,000
5.	<u>Junior Science Summer School</u>	\$75,000	Total	\$75,000
6.	<u>Learning and Development</u>			
	Vacation Schools	\$10,000		
	On-line learning module/s	\$20,000	Total	\$30,000
7.	<u>Student Extension Program</u>			
	- Information Technology	\$127,000	Total	\$127,000
				<u>TOTAL</u> \$940,000

The budget allocations are of interest in that they show that the third component was not separately funded and it would seem this aspect of the initiative was not developed as a separate component although the Focus schools

have worked effectively in creating public awareness of gifted children and their needs and of Education Queensland's initiatives in providing for their special needs.

However it must be noted in this introductory stage of the Review that funding for schools under Grants for Districts was only provided for the first two years of the GATE Initiative and no funds were made available for this purpose in the 2000-2001 financial year. Further in 2000-2001, instead of the Grants for Districts allocation, new allocations have emerged which were not considered as previously as part of the GATE Initiative although all but the Learning Development projects have been Education Queensland activities in previous years though funded, however, from other sources within the Education Queensland budget. The changes reflected in the above budget figures reveal that the original GATE Initiative has been reduced to the single component of the Focus school.

After schools were invited to forward submissions for selection as a Focus Schools and the submissions were then assessed according to criteria covering four main areas:

1. Evidence of prior commitment to and involvement in G&T education;
2. Willingness of whole staff, including administration, to commit time and energy to the practice of G&T education;
3. Willingness of all staff to join in professional development;
4. Rationale for the school's involvement.

The detailed statement of criteria is shown as Appendix A.

Using this process, the first four Focus Schools were selected and these were:

Phase One schools established in 1997

Caloundra State High School
Mackay North State High School
Nambour State School
Robertson State School

In the following year, the same process was used to select a further four schools:

Phase Two schools established in 1998

Townsville State High School
Denison State School
Eagle Junction
Hatton Vale

During 2000, uncertainties about the future of Focus schools emerged. During the course of this review, I became aware that there was a belief held by some that the Focus School initiative was an inequity because other schools had not received funding to assist them in their provisions for the gifted whereas a small number of schools, the Focus Schools, had been allocated considerable funds. There was even the belief that **all** the funds, i.e. the \$935,000 for the GATE Initiative, had been distributed to the Focus Schools. When the School Grants component of GATE was not funded for 2000-2001, there were people who held the Focus Schools responsible, believing that all of the money had been given to them.. From discussions with some of those who held these views, it was evident to me that their concerns grew out of a misunderstanding or even a lack of knowledge of the GATE Initiative coupled with a belief that the initiatives in other schools should have been recognised by an allocation of funding to them. This view translated easily into a belief that the establishment of the Focus schools was an inequity and had discriminated against schools where worthwhile provisions were being made for gifted children.

By March, 2000, staff in the Focus Schools became aware that their future was under a cloud. Principals became aware, though not through formal written communications, of the following:

- i a new plan for Gifted and Talented Education was to be developed though this was to be a plan which did not involve the Focus School concept;
- ii the funds set aside for the GATE Initiative were to be utilised in ways which had not at that stage been determined;

- iii there was a view that the Focus School provision was an inequity because it meant that a small number of schools were receiving funds which other schools could not access:
- (Reviewer's comment: In 1998-1999 and again in 1999-2000, schools had access to grants through their District Offices and the amounts of \$400,000 and \$360,000 were allocated for this purpose. It was only in 2000-2001 that no allocation was made to the Grants for Districts. This last decision would seem then to sit uncomfortably with the concern that other schools could not access funds!)*
- iv that there was to be a review which would be completed within a period of three to four weeks.
- v while within Central Office it was believed that Focus School funding would cease by the end of 2000, the Focus Schools had not been informed of this.
- vi there was to be a reconceptualisation of the provisions for Gifted and Talented Education but this would be funded within the existing budget of \$935,000.

Information such as the above created a great deal of confusion and uncertainty which was made worse by communication breakdowns. These problems could have been avoided had Focus Schools been kept informed in a more open way and had they had some involvement in the discussions which were impinging on their future.

This is illustrated by the fact that Focus School key staff were unaware of the background to the discussions which were taking place in Central Office. Impetus for these had come from Mr Terry Moran, then Director-General of Education. With the release of the "2010" document and with the State Government's statements about the "Smart State", there was a need to re-examine the policy on gifted education to determine whether it was in accord with the concept of the Smart State and with the philosophy of "2010". Mr Moran believed that once the policy was "correct", then strategies would flow from this. It was in this context that the question was being asked whether the Focus School initiative was the best way to go or were there other strategies which would serve the education of gifted students better.

From my discussions with senior officers in Education Queensland, it seems that the intent was firstly to explore the issues indicated and secondly to have a process of extensive discussions with Focus Schools, parent groups and then with other involved parties. Unfortunately, the second step was not to become a reality partly because there was a change of Directors-General and partly because this second step would only have been possible had a more open system of preliminary thinking been used rather than one which had created confusions, uncertainty and fears for career future. The combination of these factors and quite probably other factors not made known to me meant that the situation was in many ways out of control.

The deepening concern felt by staff in the Focus Schools, especially by the Enrichment Coordinators, created a climate of uncertainty which meant that time was spent discussing their future but without any real knowledge of what might be the Education Queensland vision for gifted education, a vision into which might or might not include them. Enrichment Coordinators, with no certain knowledge of what was to happen, were faced with the difficult choice of looking for other positions or of remaining in the Focus School with the hope that funding - and their work - would continue. This career choice was made more difficult when several of the Enrichment Coordinators received expressions of interest in them from the independent sector.

In this year of uncertainty, parents associated with the Focus Schools became agitated and this was understandable given that for some, the Focus school was providing their gifted child with the type of program which had been denied them in other schools. Having experienced what could be done for gifted students, parents were not prepared to accept passively the prospect that the GATE Initiative - as they had so far experienced it - would cease. Letters were written to the Minister for Education and to the Director-General of Education expressing their concerns and asking that funding not be cut. One parent raised the issue at a Community Cabinet meeting held at Mt Gravatt and this was followed at the Community Meeting at the Sunshine Coast when a number of parents spoke to the Minister expressing their concerns and arguing for funding to remain in light of the successes of the GATE Initiative. Following this meeting, the decision was made to maintain funding. In November, 2000, Principals of Focus Schools were advised that funding would continue until June 2001 but this was dependent on the Focus Schools meeting three requirements which were:

- ◆ *a completed report on activities undertaken in 2000 under this initiative. This report is due by 8 December and must outline the outcomes achieved by students, for staff and the community of your school and those schools you have supported. For those focus schools who have an agreed outreach plan with central office it will be expected that you will report against the performance indicators and outcomes outlined in your GATE Outreach Plan;*

- ◆ *involvement in a systemic review of the outcomes achieved by the eight Focus Schools over the period of the current initiative. This review will be undertaken in Term 1, 2001 and will focus on the effectiveness of the program in relation to student outcomes, whole school reform, skill and understanding of staff in gifted education and talent development and community satisfaction with the gifted and talented programs provided by the schools; and*
- ◆ *entering a service agreement between Education Queensland and the Learning and development Foundation for the provision of professional development and intensive gifted and talented support to a network of identified schools. (Letter to Principals of Focus Schools, 2 November, 2000)*

However a subsequent letter from Mr McHugh to the Principals of Focus Schools stated that the funding would now be maintained until the end of the calendar year.

It was at this point that Hatton Vale State School chose not to continue as a Learning and Development Centre (Gifted and Talented).

During this period, differing views as to the success or otherwise of the Focus Schools were evident and were impacting on considerations of their future. Indeed, it could be argued that the three requirements set down for the Focus Schools convey implicit negative messages about what the Focus Schools had actually achieved. It is out of this uncertainty that this Review has emerged to evaluate the Focus School initiative and further, to consider what might be a future direction for gifted education in this state.

3. Review of the Focus Schools - School Visits

Program of Visits

Robertson State School - 14th and 15th March

1. During the two day visit to Robertson SS, the program provided for the following:
 - ◆ Administrative Briefing with the Principal, Mr Ross Harvey, and Ms Robyn Yared, Enrichment Coordinator;
 - ◆ Discussions with the two Enrichment Coordinators, Ms Yared and Ms Mary Jane Smith;
 - ◆ Meeting with parents;
 - ◆ Interview with students in an ability grouping for gifted students;
 - ◆ Visits to classrooms to talk with teachers and students and to observe learning activities. The program involved:
 - Grade One class showing the use of Multiple Intelligences;
 - Health and Physical Education class where the Gymnastics learning experiences had been differentiated with an emphasis on problem solving;
 - Grade 4 grouping where the Number activities had been differentiated to provide for different levels of learning;
 - Grade 7 class showing contract work using Multiple Intelligences and autonomous learning;
 - Grade 2 combined group showing cooperative group work;
 - Combined Grade 5 showing Maths compacting on the topic of Time;
 - Composite 6/7 with students presenting Special Interest Talks;
 - Grade 4 working on Science Primary Investigations;
 - Extended discussion with Enrichment Coordinators.

2. Characteristics of the school program in terms of the GATE Initiative:
 - ◆ Robertson has adopted a whole school approach which is based on the Autonomous Learner Model.
 - ◆ Curriculum Compacting is used to ensure students of high ability are not held unnecessarily on tasks they have already mastered. Pre-testing is used to determine the actual level of knowledge and understanding of each student for a particular curriculum activity. This means that there is a form of streaming operating in particular subjects and it was impressive listening to and talking to children in the low group in Yr 5 maths. At the other end in the high ability group, while I was showing the teacher some interesting number patterns involving 9's and 11's, a nearby group of students became very excited by these and began to talk about patterns they knew.
 - ◆ Ability clustering is used in a number of curriculum areas and as well, the school has established a full-time composite class for gifted students
 - ◆ Units of work are planned with thinking as a planning framework, This incorporates Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, Bloom's Taxonomy, William's Taxonomy and de Bono's Six Hats. This form of planning is used at all grade levels.
 - ◆ Acceleration, in the form of grade skipping, has been used as appropriate to enable some gifted students to work at levels appropriate to their ability. In some cases, a new student had been enrolment with acceleration into a higher grade than the student had been in.
 - ◆ The emphasis on the Autonomous Learner Model and on thinking has required teachers to examine their teacher strategies and to refine these or utilise new strategies appropriate to these emphases.
 - ◆ The Enrichment Coordinators have provided an extensive Outreach program of Professional Development with a range of activities such as seminars, workshops, and modelling. In addition, they have provided telephone advice to parents and to teachers.

3. This was the first Focus School visited and it was soon obvious that there was a quality about the school. Students were enthusiastic and stimulated by the programs being offered. The program had been well considered before implementation and its implementation was primarily a factor of the depth of knowledge and understanding of the principal and the two Enrichment Coordinators, all of whom were passionate about meeting the needs of the gifted and who demonstrated a high level of empathy for these students.

In creating a Focus School, the Principal and the Enrichment Coordinators recognised that a critical step was to change staff attitudes in regard to giftedness. However attitudinal change was best promoted through structural change and at Robertson, the key to this was to create an autonomous learner school, Curriculum change flowed from this decision and in the Robertson model, curriculum change preceded identification.

Such an approach made sense of the “Bubble Up” method of identifying gifted students. because the whole school approach focused as it was on the autonomous learner and on thinking meant that an environment had been created in which gifted students felt more comfortable about demonstrating their abilities.

However even with careful planning and strong leadership, it takes a long time to move to properly implemented programs. Essential factors in successful implementation is changing attitudes, having a supportive network of principal, Enrichment Coordinators and other senior administrators, and having support from at least some staff.

In creating a Focus School, it had been very important to educate parents too as partners. The impact on parents has been significant and has created a very strong support group for the school as was evident from their efforts in 2000 and from my discussion with a representative group of parents.

Students in classroom activities and in their interactions with me demonstrated a mature confidence in their learning. An interesting example of this was the session with the 6/7 group presenting their Special Interest Talks. This was an ongoing activity and students ran the session themselves. A compere welcomed Ms Yared and me and then introduced in turn each speaker. Each speaker used palm cards and had visual aids. sample objects and at the end of the presentation responded to questions from the audience. Three judges seated at a side table scored the presentation and one judge would be asked to present a brief critique of the presentation, The teacher was then invited to make any additional comments before the three judges held up their individual marks which were then treated as competition marks with the lowest score being the final score. The quality of the talks was excellent in terms of presentation and the high level of content while the critiques were insightful and very pertinent.

Observation of and discussions with students also revealed an interesting pattern in language. Student language was characterised by its quality in terms of richness of vocabulary while speech had a vocal quality in which vowels were less flattened and consonants were less blurred or omitted. This may well be related to the multicultural nature of the school population where there is that more careful speech common to those for whom the language is newly acquired. However, it was interesting to note that these characteristics of speech together with richness of vocabulary was evident in the staff of the school. This high level of language is an indication that learning is being pitched at a higher level of thinking than is found where the focus is too centred on the average.

4. Informal discussions with students from the gifted class and with students in the classrooms visited showed their positive attitude toward the school and the range and nature of the learning activities being provided. I interviewed four students from the composite class for gifted students and while their comments revealed enthusiastic support for the school, The following two comments were of particular interest.

When asked how he liked the special class of gifted students, Student A replied, “*Oh, it’s good because all the thinkers are together*”. Student B replied, “*I like being in this class because I am with other kids who think and feel the same way as I do!*” These statements were ones which I was to hear many times in the course of my visit to the Focus Schools and their significance will be discussed later in this report.

5. The parent group was very articulate in presenting their views and were very supportive of the Focus School and what had been accomplished. Views expressed are represented by the following:

- ◆ The program has provided students with an excellent foundation for secondary school through:
 - project work
 - thinking activities
 - more opportunities for independent learning.

- ◆ This foundation meant that students were relieved to find that secondary was not as hard as they had expected because they were better prepared for it.
- ◆ The whole school approach with its emphasis on the Autonomous Learner was benefiting all children and as a result there was a much greater acceptance of the special aspects of the program where it had been differentiated for the gifted students.
- ◆ The enthusiasm for and commitment to students came down from the school administration.
- ◆ The school had a team of two Enrichment Coordinators who are passionate about the gifted and are able to empathise with them.

Two of the parents who had been present at the meeting with me subsequently forwarded emails to me. The first was from a parent whose very gifted son had been given an accelerated enrolment into Robertson where he began in Grade Two rather than Grade One. The parent wrote the following:

These last six months have been extremely stressful and emotionally draining but in the long run I know we will be grateful that we decided to have our son assessed. I know that after six months or so he will have settled in and that will be the end of MY anxiety, but as for the need for gifted focus schools, if he wasn't at Robertson, this stress would continue on for the whole of his school life! I am grateful for this school where giftedness is not only accepted but catered for and I can't imagine what a wreck I'd be if 'd constantly have to 'prove' my son was gifted and 'beg' for extension work etc.

The second was from the parent who had previously attended the Community Cabinet meeting in 2000 and had written to the Minister for Education and the Director-General of Education. Her son was accelerated from Year One to Year Two during his first year of schooling. He has since been in composite places where he has been able to progress according to his learning needs. The following are pertinent extracts from this email:

I did want you to know that we were pleased with Robertson State School, with the opportunities given to all children that attend a Focus School, and with the support and guidance always available from the Principal and the teachers . . .

Our son started reading fluently when he was two years old, He can do maths sums in his head, his spelling and grammar are excellent, he loves science and art, and he enjoys each and every day of school. I am sure this is entirely due to the surroundings he finds himself in at Robertson. He is with like minds in a class of students, but he is not an oddity. He hasn't found himself in the "too hard basket". The teachers he has had plus the support from Ross Harvey, Mary-Jane Smith and Robyn Yared have built up his confidence and encourage him to keep doing his best every day. He is well adjusted, happy, very chatty about school, and he has plenty of friends.

6. In the 2000 Report, comprehensive details of the GATE program were provided covering Outreach programs for schools, programs for parents, inservice programs for Focus School staff and activities for students. It should be noted the Robertson is a Phase One Focus School.

Activities for the Outreach program:

- 5 workshops conducted for 22 schools with 260 attendees
- 3 follow-up sharing and networking sessions
- 24 schools requested follow-up such as information/contact/visit
- appropriate resources follow-up such as information/contact/visit
- 436 units/grids/lessons shared
- 2600 photocopied handouts
- Enrichment Coordinator visited 7 schools and assistance was given with planning whole school approach, unit planning, program feedback, thinking skills and strategy implementation, compacting and differentiation
- Enrichment Coordinator mentored 2 University students including a student completing a Masters degree in Gifted and talented education
- Responses to enquires included 30 mail, 43 email, 38 phone calls, 72 faxes, 786 photocopies
- communication with lecturers from three Universities
- 2 presentations at National Conference with 95 attendees

- "Understanding Giftedness" inservice to 6 student teachers
- 15 student teachers immersed in GATE planning and practices
- hosted site visits to Robertson by 10 schools
- hosted school visit by three guests from Singapore Gifted Education Branch, Ministry of Education, prior to the National Conference
- Return visit by Enrichment Coordinator to Singapore during school vacation
- Produced video on Multiple Intelligence and used this in 5 workshops
- Produced video on Compacting the Curriculum.

Of course, an effective whole school approach requires an ongoing program of professional development and key activities were:

- National Conference attended by 5 staff with 3 staff presenting workshops
- One of these workshops was repeated for Robertson staff
- Enrichment Coordinators attended 6 workshops and I National Conference for their professional development
- Hosted school visits by 3 Enrichment Coordinators
- organised and ran agenda for Focus Schools Forum held back to back with National Conference
- participation in and contribution to monthly teleconferences of Enrichment Coordinators
- 5 staff workshops conducted
- Enrichment Coordinator contribution and input to staff meetings, year level meetings, unit planning and feedback, curriculum management team
- all new staff inserviced in curriculum compacting
- Enrichment Coordinator planning and modelling of GATE strategies through intervention model

In addition, there were activities for parents::

- 2 presentations at QAGTC evenings with 80 parents attending
- responded to 40 phone enquiries from parents with gifted children
- conducted 3 counselling sessions for particular parents
- 200 photocopies of information mailed
- hosted 10 classroom visits for parents interested in enrolling children
- Upgraded school website to promote the whole school approach to the GATE Initiative and practices
- 4 information sessions delivered to parents.

7. Aspects of the GATE Initiative in terms of student learning/activities were:

- 1 student was accelerated and 2 students received early entry
- 5 case meetings held to consider acceleration
- 2 students received IEP's
- 22 students monitored and counselled on weekly/monthly/term basis
- liaison with 3 high schools regarding programming and curriculum opportunities
- 2 students attending High school extension program
- Years 1-7 have all implemented 'enrichment learning'
- Lower grades working on developing skills for self-directed learning
- 1 TOM team
- 28 students participated in Day of Excellence
- 4 students attended 'Under 8's Week' for gifted students
- 2 Excellence Expo teams
- 10 guest speakers for special enrichment activities.

8. In the first seven weeks of the 2001 school year, the two Enrichment Coordinators:
- conducted an inservice workshop for 31 teachers representing 8 schools
 - received enquiries from 14 schools, some with multiple requests which required considerable time to respond to their needs
 - received 4 requests for visits to Robertson from staff of other schools including a private school and a group of eleven international teachers.
 - 4 enquires from University students as well as a site visit by one student
 - requests for information from two private schools
 - 5 enquiries from parents considering enrolling their children at Robertson
 - visit by the Senate Committee enquiring into gifted education.

This does not include the ongoing support for the network schools associated with Robertson, the professional development of Robertson staff as well as liaison with the other Enrichment Coordinators and Central Office.

Eagle Junction State School - 20th and 21st March

1. During the two day visit, the program arranged for me provided the following:
- ◆ Administrative briefing with the Principal, Mr Ken Falvey, and the Enrichment Coordinator, Ms Liz Campbell;
 - ◆ Detailed discussions with the Enrichment Coordinator, Ms Campbell;
 - ◆ Meeting with parents;
 - ◆ Telephone interview with a parent;
 - ◆ Visits to classrooms to talk with teachers and to observe learning activities. This program involved:
 - Grade I teacher to discuss a student who had been accelerated into Grade 2 in 2000,
 - the Grade 2 teacher who received the accelerated student,
 - the Grade Grade 3 teacher now teaching the accelerated student,
 - Grade One teacher who had previously worked in the Senior school and had developed innovative Language Arts programs:
 - teacher of a Grade 4/5 Composite class of selected high achieving students,
 - Grade 6 where students were carrying out problem solving in cooperative groups;
 - Grade 6/7 of selected high achievers working in cooperative groups rotating through a series of English activities;
 - Grade 7 where students were working in cooperative groups rotating through a series of Science activities Science activites,
 - ◆ Visit to Ascot State School which is planning to introduce new programs in gifted education with the assistance of Ms Campbell. During this visit I visited a 3/4 class of selected high ability children, met with the teacher and talked with students.
 - ◆ Extended discussions with Enrichment Coordinator.
2. Characteristics of the school program in terms of the GATE Initiative:
- ◆ Although Eagle Junction had been part of the Unicorn program, it is a Phase Two Focus School entering the GATE program in mid-1998. The remainder of the year was devoted to staff training. This resulted in a shift in staff attitudes with the majority of staff (99%) supporting the GATE Initiative. The positive staff attitudes have carried over into the classroom and there is now a heightened awareness of the need to provide for gifted students.
 - ◆ Gifted students are being provided for through the following:
 - Units of work are planned with thinking as a planning framework, This incorporates Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, Bloom's Taxonomy, William's Taxonomy and de Bono's Six Hats. This form of planning is used at all grade levels.

- Differentiation strategies
 - Curriculum Compaction
 - Acceleration
 - ability clustering.
- ◆ There is a whole school approach which is on focussed learning in the classroom.
 - ◆ Teachers have been supported in developing their own educational philosophies and they have found this very liberating. The students, especially the gifted ones, seem very aware of this positive development.
 - ◆ Staff are striving for excellence and as a result, students seem to have developed more because of the expectations of staff.
 - ◆ Because of the emphasis on thinking in the planning of classroom learning activities, students are more motivated to learn. As a consequence, teachers find that they don't have to spend time on behaviour management and instead spend it on teaching.
 - ◆ It was interesting to note the enthusiasm and the creative experimentation of some of the teachers who were within ten years or less of retirement. The reason for this, I believe, is that these are teachers who for too many years have had to cope with new ideas and all too often this has made them feel that they are old-fashioned in their approach to teaching, and made them feel inferior compared to younger teachers who have either been trained on particular new approaches or are quick to seize hold of these as new educational "truths". As the older teachers have developed their understanding of gifted education, they have come to realise that at the heart of gifted education is good teaching.
That realisation is very liberating for them because long experience has developed their understanding of what makes good teaching. The difference is that they knew the practices of good teaching but they did not have the conceptual understanding which the emphasis on thinking has now given them. As self-esteem has risen, these teachers have become more creative and more willing to experiment.

This observation is one which I realised I had noted at Robertson but had only articulated it at Eagle Junction. From then on it became a pattern in all the Focus Schools and it is an unexpected but important outcome of the initiative. It has an important message for all inservicing designed to change attitudes and set patterns of teaching: *Help the teachers to feel good about themselves and good about their teaching and they will much more readily embrace change.*

3. The parent session proved very interesting with the strong support for the school and its gifted and talented program. The following comments were representative of that support:
- ◆ Gifted and talented education has been a whole school approach characterised by a culture of **acceptance of difference**. It is also a complete approach to planning rather than an add-on of enrichment activities.
 - ◆ The emphasis in the school is on thinking.
 - ◆ The school community is one which values education and which sees it as okay to succeed, to do well. This has been a very important aspect of the Focus School.
 - ◆ The concern that gifted programs might be elitist has been removed by creating a climate in which every child is offered positive experiences. However there is no demand placed on the child to excel at anything - just do their best.
 - ◆ At this school, the gifted children see less able children as people with talents.

In addition, a parent who was unable to attend the meeting with me talked with me by phone and provided me with a copy of the letter she had written the Minister regarding the proposed ending of Focus School funding. Particularly relevant to my visit to Eagle Junction SS were the following extracts:

It has been my experience that gifted students who attend focus schools are having their needs addressed. . . . My family has experienced first hand the benefits of the Focus School Programme. Eagle Junction's school based Enrichment Coordinator has provided:

- *Staff and parent education in the areas of identification of potentially gifted students and understanding of the special needs these students have;*
- *Professional staff development regarding implementation of gifted teaching strategies throughout the school. This has resulted in enhanced service delivery for all children in all classrooms, while effectively targeting gifted students;*
- *Small group extension and enrichment specifically for these students who need it;*
- *Support for gifted students and their families;*
- *Outreach to teachers from other schools through professional development, support when requested and visitation..*

4. In the 2000 Report, comprehensive details of the GATE program were provided covering Outreach programs for schools, programs for parents, inservice programs for Focus School staff and activities for students. The following details are taken from that 2000 Report:

Activities in the Outreach program were:

- Meetings with 4 client schools to discuss needs and actions and to develop differentiated programs of professional development;
- modelled and ways in which curriculum planning was being implemented;
- Workshops by Enrichment Coordinator and key teachers for three schools, 1 being a client school and 2 other schools interested in G&T. Total participants were 92 teachers;
- Visits by Enrichment Coordinator to Ascot SS to assist with unit planning using thinking skills, modelling of lessons from units, further assistance in unit planning and sharing of G&T resources. 13 teachers were involved in this program of visits;
- Workshops conducted by Enrichment Coordinator at Payne Road SS for teachers from Payne Road SS and Bardon SS. There were 34 attendees;
- Workshop organised and coordinated by Enrichment Coordinator and presented by external consultant on Teaching for thinking and Multiple Intelligences. 11 schools were represented with 22 attendees;
- Assistance of other staff in Outreach program: 3 teachers used for open classroom visits. 4 teachers released to assist Enrichment Coordinator in planing. 6 teachers assist with the facilitation of Outreach;
- Workshops for student teachers on G&T issues and planning. Supervising teachers modelled GATE practices in their classrooms and require student teachers to include GATE in their planning;
- Thinkfest held for students, parents and teachers with 5 schools participating. 100 students (20 from each school) participated. Teachers were able to see thinking skills and problem solving in action;
- Resources such as articles, information sheets resource lists provided on request to teachers and parents;
- Meeting with administrative staff in client schools to discuss the creation of a District Network;
- Enrichment Coordinator presented a seminar at QAGTC program at St Peters.

Of course, an effective whole school approach requires an ongoing program of professional development and keys activities were:

- Enrichment Coordinator attended National Conference;
- Enrichment Coordinator attended year level planning meetings to support staff in implementing GATE practices:
- Teachers invited to attend all outreach workshops provided by Enrichment Coordinator. All new staff were required to attend.
- Teachers attended workshops run by external consultants;
- Enrichment Coordinator works individually with teachers throughout year ascertaining needs and devising ways to support teachers in implementing GATE strategies into daily classroom practices

In my meeting with a group of parents, it was evident that there is very strong support for the school's GATE program. Parents were very knowledgeable and this indicates that the parent and community program conducted in 1998 and 1999 when the Focus School program was being developed and implemented had been very effective. Parents are informed about particular aspects of the GATE program through the School Council, materials sent home by teachers relating to particular aspects of the class activities, and through discussions with the Enrichment Coordinator who also provides resource materials on request.. There is a strong partnership between parents and teachers which has provided excellent support for the GATE program.

In addition, parents were invited to participate in the Thinkfest while the seminar presented at St Peters was for both teachers and parents.

5. Aspects of the GATE Initiative in terms of student learning/activities were:
- acceleration of 1 student after one term in Grade One into Grade Two, with ongoing support and monitoring of the child, the receiving teacher and parents, provided by Enrichment Coordinator and Guidance Officer;
 - revision of school's acceleration policy;
 - Units plans for cooperative teaching in Years 2, 4 and 6;
 - Individual Project/Studies developed for individual students in Years 2, 3 and 4. These were developed by Enrichment Coordinator in liaison with teacher and child;
 - Enrichment Coordinator working with small groups of children on a rotational basis in Years 1, 2 and 3;
 - TOM, Thinkfest.

Eagle Junction is a Phase Two Focus School with the Enrichment Coordinator being a 0.6 position with the remaining time as a classroom teacher.

Townsville State High School - 27th and 28th March

1. During the two day visit to Townsville SH, the program provided the following:
- ◆ Administrative Briefing with the Principal, Mr Bill Sperring and Ms Jenni Auteri. Enrichment Coordinator. Unfortunately, the other Enrichment Coordinator, Ms Leslie McKenzie, was on sick leave at the time of this visit;
 - ◆ Meeting with gifted Senior students and this was followed by a discussion with one Senior student at the suggestion of the Enrichment Coordinator;
 - ◆ Discussions with Mr Wally Mark, Deputy Principal;
 - ◆ Meeting with parents;
 - ◆ Discussions with Heads of Department (Science, SOSE and Maths)
 - ◆ Visit to Year 9 Navigating Education class for gifted students to observe and to talk with students;
 - ◆ Visit to Year 10 Navigating Education class for gifted students to observe and to talk with students;
 - ◆ Morning Tea and discussion with staff;
 - ◆ Meeting with two ex-students who are currently enrolled at James Cook University. The students were accompanied by their mothers and participated in the discussion;
 - ◆ Attending a planning meeting with two representatives from Townsville Central SS and Pimlico SS;
 - ◆ brief, spontaneous chats with randomly selected students in the course of my moving around the school;
 - ◆ Extended discussion with Enrichment Coordinator.
2. In the briefing sessions and discussions with the Enrichment Coordinator, particular aspects of Townsville SH were noted as background information of some importance. These were:
- ◆ the school is an inner-city school characterised by:
 - high mobility,
 - 20% of the school population are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander,
 - being the ESL (English as a Second Language centre for Townsville.
 - ◆ The diversity of the school population has meant that it often regarded as:
 - ◆ a blackboard jungle,
 - ◆ a place not to be sent to as a teacher.
 - ◆ a proud history of achievement in sporting, cultural and academic activities (*materials were provided to me to illustrate these achievements*);

From these discussions, from the School Newsletter and from the publicising of school achievements in local media, there has been a very deliberate effort to demonstrate the quality of the school and its achievements in a variety of fields. However while the school has a considerable reputation in sporting and athletic areas, these do not dominate the publicity and a very balanced approach is taken. This is an important step in minimising the use of the “nerd” label to describe students who are academically oriented.

The Principal also commented that there had been a reduction of behaviour management problems with the introduction to the curriculum described below and the changes which were being made to teaching strategies. This was reinforced quite independently by the Police Officer who is assigned to various schools in Townsville.

3. Characteristics of the school program in terms of the GATE Initiative:

- ◆ whole school approach built on the foundation of the “**Democratic vertically inclusive curriculum**” - *see later description of this*;
- ◆ acceleration and self-paced learning;
- ◆ planning for differentiated classrooms;
- ◆ **Navigation Education** which is a special program in which gifted students work in a special grouping in the second semester of Year 8 and in Years 9 and 10. The program emphasises thinking skills, problem solving and independent learning;
- ◆ program writing for new syllabuses using GATE strategies such as Bloom, Multiple Intelligences, and other approaches to thinking;
- ◆ a G&T website;
- ◆ professional development workshops.
- ◆ school philosophy is one which rejects *sameness* and encourages *difference* which, however, has to be harnessed.

Because of the importance of the Democratic Vertically Inclusive Curriculum, this needs to be outlined. This curriculum is described as *democratic* because it provides for students to make choices in the planning of their program for the Junior school and these are choices to suit their learning needs and interest as fully as possible. It is also a democratic curriculum because it has a focus on developing the students to be first rate future citizens.

The curriculum is a *vertical* one because is based on stages of development and the needs of students enabling students to progress at rates commensurate with their abilities. This is in contrast to the traditional secondary school curriculum which is organised on the basis of student ages, grades, time and subjects.

The curriculum is *inclusive* because it caters for individual differences so that it includes gifted students as well as students with special needs. It utilises a mastery of learning so that the point for progressing is when mastery has been achieved and demonstrated and not when a specific point in time has been reached.

To meet the three principles of democratic, vertical and inclusive, the curriculum is supported by a range of structures:

- Vertical timetabling
- Reef Counselling (*Reef Counsellors are selected staff who work with individual students and parents in planning the student's program of study.*)
- Semester units of study
- Resource Hire scheme
- Care system
- detailed handbooks

Further, the curriculum has to have the flexibility to accommodate the different patterns of study determined by and for the individual student. This is achieved by the following choices:

- a choice between and within traditional subjects;
- students are able to work across traditional Year levels such as 8/9, 9/10, 10/11 and 11/12;
- students are able to repeat units to upgrade results;
- students may double up e.g. taking two Science units at the one time;
- All students take 6 subject units at any one time with all units having equal time and without any hierarchy of importance or value.
- where a unit, selected by a students and agreed upon as part of the plan of study, is not available because of timetabling, the student is able to take the unit by independent study.

Such a curriculum concept does provide a structure in which the needs of gifted students can be accommodated especially when part of the plan of study for these students is the Navigation Education (NavEd). It is important to note that for students with learning problems and functioning levels which place them as Special Needs students, mastery of learning is of critical importance. For these students, base level units of study are core units and provision is made for these units to be repeated. However when a unit is being repeated for these students, replanning is done to re-teach but in different ways in order to minimise the student's sense of failure and inadequacy.

The above outline of the democratic vertically inclusive timetable is drawn from school material such as information sheets for parents and from the school's submission for selection as a Focus school.

4. The session with parents indicated that they were very supportive and believed that their gifted students were being well-provided for in that they were challenged by the work especially in NavEd which they considered was providing an excellent foundation for the years of Senior education. The positive relationship between the parents and Mr Sperring and Ms Auteri was an indication of both their support and the extent to which they feel part of the school and its program.
5. Discussions with students also provided strong support for the overall GATE program but especially for NavEd. All students believed that the NavEd course had helped them to learn how to think more effectively, how to work independently and how to organise themselves especially in terms of time management. These were seen as skills which were helping them in other subjects. Year 11 students reinforced this with comments about the way NavEd had provided them with a foundation which was proving a major asset for their Senior studies.

One student stated that ***"It's great to have the opportunity to be working with kids like me!"*** This comment was not expressed with any sense of arrogance but instead as a statement of reality which is consonant with research findings from studies investigating the grouping of gifted children into "gifted groups". These are studies over a period of more than half a century.¹ The student's comment had been expressed previously at Robertson and Eagle Junction and was to be a recurring comment through the visits to Focus Schools.

The discussions also indicated that throughout the school there was a general acceptance of a key belief if gifted students are to "bubble up" or if they are to avoid hiding their abilities. This belief was stated as: ***It's okay to be smart!***

6. In the 2000 Report, comprehensive details of the GATE program were provided covering Outreach programs for schools, programs for parents, inservice programs for Focus School staff and activities for students. It should be noted that Townsville State High is a Phase Two Focus School. The following details are taken from that 2000 Report:

Activities in the Outreach program were:

- Coordinators provided inservice workshops in Townsville and regional schools on:
 - Nature of giftedness,
 - identification of gifted students,
 - strategies for differentiating subjects

¹ The number of studies examining the outcomes of full-time ability grouping for gifted students is vast. However meta-studies by Kulik and Kulik, by Karen Rodgers and by Feldhusen and Moon provide an excellent background. Details are provided in the list of references

- specific school needs
- development of a web page to provide schools with easy access to GATE principles, policies, practices and curriculum units;
- email network established between Focus School and interested personnel from other schools;
- Hosting visits by individual teachers and representatives from other schools interested in GATE and the democratic, vertically inclusive curriculum. These visits included both single classrooms and the whole school;
- provision of a session on gifted education to 30 pre-service students from the B.Ed course at James Cook University.
- production of materials for SOSE Head of Department for a lecture at James Cook University;
- provided a lending service of selected books on G&T to teachers in Outreach schools. This provided professional support to teachers but encouraged the schools to a library on gifted education for the use of staff;
- preparation of resource and other information materials on G&T;
- Enrichment Coordinators attended and presented at Teacher 2000 Conference;
- Enrichment Coordinators attended and presented at National Conference. They were accompanied by Deputy Principal and Maths HOD;
- further development of a bank of resources supporting GATE in order to assist Townsville SH staff and staff in other schools.

Aspects of the ongoing program of professional development and keys activities were:

- new Senior Science program develop in a Bloom's Taxonomy framework;
- Subject specialists working cooperatively with Enrichment Coordinators in planning and implementing workshops such as:
- workshop on differentiation in Maths leading to the Maths program being written to include differentiation strategies;
- provision of one Professional Development workshop per term;
- provision of one faculty workshop per month. Both sets of workshops have led to staff developing and sharing units of study. All departments have participated in these seminars.

Aspects of the ongoing program for parents were:

- Parent Information session at Primary-Secondary Transition evening;
- information sessions for Townsville SH parents and parents from Outreach schools;
- Enrichment Coordinators provide support and information through discussion at the school and by telephone;
- Assisting in the development of a Townsville Branch of the QAGTC;
- information to parents through school newsletters.

Aspects of the GATE Initiative in terms of student learning/activities were:

- ongoing development and refinement of NavEd program;
- preparation of a Power Point presentation on NavEd developed by students;
- provision of individual study paths;
- Maths/Science High Fliers program:
- accelerated Maths and extension units;
- Engineering link program;
- participation in Tournament of Minds;
- links with schools in Japan and United Kingdom for student exchange;
- participation for talented basketball players in Tropics, the McDonalds North Queensland Basketball Academy.

It is interesting to note that during my visit, one of the NavEd students was informed that he had been selected for a prestigious National Computer workshop. This student had produced a web site of outstanding quality for a Townsville Taxi Company. His program at school recognises this gifted student's expertise with development of power point presentations and high quality assignments on CD.

Mackay North State High School - 29th and 30th March

1. During the two day visit to Mackay North SS, the program included:
 - ◆ attendance at an evening presentation for parents by Leslie Sword, a Clinical Psychologist specialising in Gifted children and a well-received presenter at the Annual Conference of the QAGTC. Ms Tricia Becker, the Enrichment Coordinator, had organised this presentation for parents as well as a workshop for teachers by Leslie Sword. Both the teacher and the parent sessions were very well attended;
 - ◆ Administrative Briefing with the Principal, Ms Linda Boyle, and Ms Becker, the Enrichment Coordinator;
 - ◆ Meeting with parents and subsequently a meeting with parents of a gifted child attending another school in Mackay;
 - ◆ Meeting with staff from various subject areas;
 - ◆ Meeting with Mr Doug Sturgeon, Principal, Mackay North SS
 - ◆ Telephone conference with a classroom teacher from a network school;
 - ◆ Meeting with Dr Bruce Knight, Central Queensland University;

- ◆ Meeting with a group of gifted students;
- ◆ Extended discussion with Enrichment Coordinator.

2. In the briefing sessions and discussions with the Enrichment Coordinator, particular aspects of Mackay North SH were noted as background information of some importance. These were:

:

- ◆ Initially the school had to cope with considerable resentment from some schools although this has improved since then;
- ◆ The school has had to cope with some difficult internal problems, namely:
 - there is a very large turn-over of staff which has meant:
 - that there is a constant need for professional development,
 - the development of the school as a whole is slow,
 - many staff have been at the school for a number of years and this can affect willingness to embrace approaches such as GATE which has to challenge organisational structures, curriculum planning, strategies and assessments of learning;
 - Heads of Department tend to hold differing views about giftedness and about how to provide for them. This can inhibit whole school changes.
- ◆ Problems are experienced when students come to Mackay North from Primary schools where there have been no provisions for gifted students;
- ◆ Change needs to begin with the curriculum and identification follows.
- ◆ GATE practices cannot be implemented “overnight”. Attitudes have to change before practices can change and attitudinal change requires a supportive network for the Enrichment Coordinator and the network must involve the Principal, ideally a Deputy Principal and at least some staff who are prepared to lead the way.
- ◆ Gifted Education in the school has been a small investment with impressive outcomes;
- ◆ A strength of the Focus School program is that it has been someone’s prime responsibility to promote change;

3. Characteristics of the program in terms of the GATE Initiative:
- ◆ the development of secondary curriculum units;
 - ◆ professional development workshops and curriculum support negotiated to meet the needs of the school and other district schools;
 - ◆ facilitation of across-district professional development by utilising visiting experts;
 - ◆ across-district enrichment and mentoring activities for students;
 - ◆ Facilitation of subject specific district network meetings to share learning and assessment strategies;
 - ◆ conference management;
 - ◆ Student chat-page;
 - ◆ facilitation of GLEAM (Group for Learning Enrichment Activities, Mackay) teacher network with associated professional development and resource sharing;
 - ◆ facilitation of QAGTC sub-branch and appropriate parent workshops;
 - ◆ involvement in research projects for Central Queensland University;
 - ◆ management of research project for Central Queensland University;
 - ◆ management of research projects for Central Queensland University;
 - ◆ regular newsletters to 76 district schools;
 - ◆ individual support to parents.
4. At the school level, Social Science proved a very useful tool for improving gifted education. SOSE was a useful starting point. Because it was a new syllabus it was quite different from other syllabuses and required different ways of teaching and learning. However to manage this important curriculum change, it was important that someone had prime responsibility and did not have to balance the demands of teaching a class and the demands of curriculum development. SOSE was planned so that in the first three terms, the program was only a core with extensions. However in the fourth term, the program was an elective one offering:
- Revisiting the core (On recommendation or selection)
 - History extension
 - Geography extension
 - Independent study for gifted students (on recommendation or selection).

Extension Science and Extension English are other programs for the more able students..

However, while changes are being implemented at Mackay North SH, the Outreach program is impressive as is illustrated in a later section. A particular feature too has been the provisions for parents such as the presentation I had attended.

In one of the staff interviews, the following important comment was made:

It is important for teachers to receive professional development because they need new ways of doing things. Gifted students need information presented differently because they learn and think differently.

This comment is significant because it expresses a core principle in gifted education.

5. Comments from particular interviews:

Mr Doug Sturgeon, Principal of Mackay North State Primary School provided the following comments in our discussions:

- was very appreciative of having an Enrichment Coordinator nearby, especially at the school to which most of his students would go after completing primary education;
- Praised the Days of Excellence and the workshops with visiting experts including the program in which musically talented students worked with a recording artist to write and record a song;
- expressed his pleasure that the Northside Consortium had been established as a structure for change;
- raised a problem with Fanfare which he regards as a highlight of Queensland Education and which must be retained. However because only the best schools from each district are selected, primary schools miss out on being selected when having to compete against secondary schools. He felt that this does not send a positive message to primary schools and to their students who work so hard in their commitment to music.

Ms Tracey Batchelor, class teacher, Moranbah SS

- stated that it was very handy to have contact with someone who is providing leadership in gifted education;
- is part of a cluster group which has had specialist inservice sessions. Has also been visited by the Enrichment Coordinator and believes that this has been helpful for the Guidance Officer;
- is very comfortable with the Focus School program and its work in gifted education has achieved greater credibility because the Enrichment Coordinator is a teacher;
- explained the problem of staff mobility in the following way. A Thinking Skills program had been established after inservicing by Enrichment Coordinator and had become quite strong. However when a number of the staff moved to other schools, the program has largely been dropped and will be that way until a new burst of inservicing is provided;
- suggested that one of the issues in gifted education is that in order to work positively in G&T, “you have to be secure in yourself” and unfortunately some teachers do not have that degree of confidence.

Dr Bruce Knight, Head, Faculty of Education and Creative Arts, CQU

- The Focus School has worked brilliantly but this is mainly due to the efforts of the Enrichment Coordinator. Ms Becker is basically covering the district and is the key to the development of the network of schools. Of course, she has been aided by the excellent support of the Principal.
- The Enrichment Coordinator has worked intersystemically but this has been on a user-pays principle.
- A particular strength of the Focus School program has been its emphasis on parents.
- Gifted education is really good teaching practice and because of this it asks all teachers to look at what they are doing and then to build on that.
- In the future, he believes:
 - the Focus Schools should continue;
 - Outreach role of Enrichment Coordinator will be of increasing importance;
 - The Enrichment Coordinator position is the key to the program and must be not only maintained but extended.
 - Greater flexibility in the educational system is essential and this means that barriers need to be examined and changes made:
 - entry into school,
 - class progression,
 - Primary/Secondary,
 - Junior/Secondary
 - Secondary/University.

6. The following comments were made during my meeting with a group of gifted students and are recorded here because they are of particular interest:

- *Greatest problem is with teachers who do not understand what giftedness is. It is not a question of finances.*

- *The most important change would be for teachers to have a willingness to acknowledge that giftedness exists.*
- ***“Before I came into the gifted program, I felt like an alien but now I don’t because I have time with others like me!”***

7. In the 2000 Report, comprehensive details of the GATE program were provided covering Outreach programs for schools, programs for parents, inservice programs for Focus School staff and activities for students. It should be noted Mackay North SH is a Phase One Focus School. The following details are taken from that 2000 Report:

Activities in the Outreach program were:

- Enrichment Coordinator conducted Differentiated Curriculum Workshop for 20 teachers from 11 schools;
- Enrichment Coordinator presented paper at AAEGTC Conference;
- Enrichment Coordinator facilitated network meetings from a G&T perspective:
 - 3 GLEAM meetings which included inservice conducted by peers,
 - Science teachers’ network involving 15 teachers from 13 schools,
 - SOSE teachers’ network involving 16 teachers from 10 schools,
 - Teacher/librarians’ network with 9 teachers attending,
 - Creche and Kindergarten with 11 teachers and teacher aides,
- significant level of inservice, mentoring and resource support together with student participation in activities has been provided to 9 schools;
- increased support provided to Proserpine SHS and Proserpine SS with significant mentoring of the contact teachers leading to plans for a while school approach being put in place with support from administration and staff;
- Specific advice provided to 17 schools in regard to individual students, teacher development and curriculum guidance;
- arranged for professional development sessions by visiting expert with 41 teachers from 19 schools attending the first and 43 teachers from 16 schools attending the second;
- 5 newsletters produced and distributed to 67 schools, contact teachers and district office personnel;
- Enrichment Coordinator acting as Research assistant for CQU’s research project on *Identifying best practices to teach gifted students*;
- Enrichment Coordinator presented paper on CQU research project on *Meeting the needs of gifted students in the regular classroom* at National Conference;
- Enrichment Coordinator participated in 2 online conferences and 3 networks;
- Enrichment Coordinator has been responsible for purchasing and managing district text and software resources with 22 schools borrowing text resources;

Aspects of the ongoing program of professional development and keys activities were:

- GATE inservice for new teachers from Mackay North as well as new teachers from registered contact schools;
- 27 staff participated in:
 - GLEAM and subject specific network meetings,
 - Consultant’s workshops,
 - The Differentiated Curriculum workshop,
 - TOM Facilitators Workshop,
- 21 staff participated in:
- Yr 9/10 English teachers’ workshops,
- Unit writing session (SOSE and Science)
- Assignment writing workshop (Science)
- 13 English units written and 43 units written in 1999 were implemented across 3 subject areas;

Aspects of the ongoing program for parents were:

- support to parents by telephone contact and/or visit - 17 families utilised this;
- providing information to parents regarding workshops and activities - 82 families on the mailing list;
- providing parents with access to reference materials - 12 parents borrowed materials;

- support to QAGTC by providing meeting venue, co-ordination of workshop presenters, communication:
 - 3 evening meetings conducted with attendance from 25 to 130.
 - 82 families on mailing list,

Aspects of the GATE Initiative in terms of student learning/activities were:

- more able students were challenged by the electives provided in Yr 8 and 9 SOSE and Yr 10 Science;
- involvement in Art, Sport and Music Schools of Excellence with school band performing in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games;
- 2 TOM teams won at regional level and of these one won at state level and gained Honours at the national level;
- extension units built into revised program for Year 8 by SOSE Head of Department;
- Following the success of a Year 8 lunchtime program in Science, a Science Olympiad was organised for Year 7 students across the district. 52 students from 9 schools attended;
- online extension for gifted students in Year 8 Maths as part of a compaction program;
- Day of Excellence in music was conducted for 20 students from 7 schools;
- links with CQU, University of Queensland and Central Queensland Conservatorium strengthen to facilitate dual enrolments in 2001;
- Writers' and Artists' camp attended 52 students from 9 schools;
- planning for Master classes in music in 2001 with Lorin Hollander

Note: Additional information for 2001 showed a high level of activity ranging from:

- individual assessment of a student by an external assessor,
- organising workshops by two visiting experts,
- inservice for 27 new teachers,
- responding to requests and enquiries from teachers, parents,
- organising travel, accommodation, publicity for the visiting expert sessions,
- teleconference with Central Office and other Enrichment Coordinators,
- work at various schools,
- writing various articles ,
- Enrichment Coordinators teleconference,
- workshop for teachers involving 39 teachers from 19 schools,
- workshop for parents with 51 parents attending,
- working with teachers participating in an action research project,
- meeting in Brisbane with Enrichment Coordinators,
- presented paper at QAGTC Conference,
- held workshop for teachers, Guidance Officers and counsellors with Lesley Sword,
- held workshop for parents with Lesley Sword.

Nambour State School - 3rd and 4th April

1. During the two day visit, the program provided for the following:
 - ◆ Administrative briefing with the Principal, Mr Bryan Hatcher, and the Enrichment Coordinator, Ms Julie Maat;
 - ◆ interviews with selected staff;
 - ◆ visiting classrooms to speak with teachers and staff:
 - maths ability clusters for Yrs 3, 5 and 6/7;
 - literature Yr 6;
 - ◆ meeting with GATE Committee;
 - ◆ evening meeting with GATE Parent Community Forum;
 - ◆ interviews with individual parents;
 - ◆ meeting with gifted students;
 - ◆ series of telephone interviews with Outreach schools,

- ◆ ongoing discussions with the two Enrichment Coordinator, Ms Julie Maat,

2. Characteristics of the Nambour GATE Initiative:

- emphasis of the program is on academic programs because this is the prime focus of schools;
- giftedness requires identification + programs + curriculum;
- programs being offered are only programs which are well supported by research:
- ability groupings, even where the group is not completely a gifted group, is a key strategy in the program;
- pullout programs are no longer being used because these are not supported by research;
- use of a curriculum planning framework which emphasised various approaches to thinking such as de Bono, Multiple Intelligences, Bloom's Taxonomy;
- identification using a number of different procedures including some form of objective assessments including assessment of intellectual functioning.

3. From discussions with Mr Hatcher, Ms Maat, and the GATE Committee the following points emerged:

- Nambour is a school with a very wide range of intellectual abilities with a significant number of students falling into the Special Needs category. A further complication is the nature of the school community which includes a relatively large number of families who move from community to community quite frequently and also a number of families with "alternate lifestyles". These factors impinge on the overall quality of the school.

Yet because of these somewhat negative aspects of the school population and its community, Nambour is a more typical school than either Robertson or Eagle Junction where both draw on a middle class population in which many are professionals.

- Gifted education is specifically about providing for student who have been identified as gifted. However identification requires some level of objective assessment.
- While staff training in GATE is essential, this must be supported by mentoring. This applies to both the Inreach and the Outreach Professional development of staff.
- There are tensions in schools - and Nambour is no exception to this - between providing for the gifted and providing for Special Education, especially when Special Education is funded well.
- The clustering by ability has promoted greater learning.
- While TOM can provide positive experiences for gifted children, there are problems with it. The teams are rarely teams only of gifted students and not all gifted students want to participate because of the mix of students. This is because in some cases, they are relied on to be the ideas members and the leaders while in others, their ideas are rejected and they are not allowed to make a significant contribution. Also, where the teams are strong in terms of being comprised of all or almost all gifted students, this can result in battles between strong but very different ideas.
- There is a problem in the interface between Primary and Secondary with secondary showing little or no recognition of the fact that a child is gifted and making no provisions for the advanced level of learning with which the gifted child has entered secondary.
- The pressure of preparing data for the Year 2 Diagnostic Net has delayed the establishing of programs for the gifted students and this can cause frustrations for these students and then anxiety for their parents.

- The core business of schools needs to be re-thought to ensure that differentiation for the gifted is part of that core business and not an add-on..

4. Interviews with staff selected by me were held and while the overwhelming response was very positive in terms of being a Focus School, comments of particular significance for this report have been extracted from these discussions:

- The program has raised awareness in terms of gifted students and of different levels of ability in the classroom.

Prefers gifted children being given individual assistance and working on specific tasks rather than withdrawal. Withdrawal has problems with ensuring good communication among the staff involved, that is between the person providing the pull-out enrichment program and the classroom teachers of the children being withdrawn. Also there were problems of continuity whenever the Enrichment Coordinator was away on Outreach programs or in Brisbane.

- The big positive is that being a Focus School has given access to people who really know gifted education and who know what research supports and what it does not. It has also provided greater access to gifted education materials.

Unfortunately, the Focus School concept has encouraged some parents who are “never-satisfied” but these are not typical. The majority are happy that at last their child has been recognised and that something is going to be done for them.

- The key people in the program are the teachers but here are variations in how they approach the task. Strongly supports streaming by ability and considers that it is the only way to provide properly for gifted children.

Different strategies are needed for gifted groups because:

- they learn more by themselves,
- they need greater challenge.

Being a Focus School is wonderful but there is a need for teachers to support gifted education philosophically.

- The GATE program has been successful because the ideas have been embraced by the teacher who believes that this has impacted on her normal teaching because she is now thinking about the individual students and their learning needs. Her use of questioning has developed and the program has changed her whole way of thinking.

Streaming of Year 5 has been very successful.

- Changing to a Focus School has made a difference. The upper ability end has never been properly recognised and funded. Believes that Special Education has yielded enormous power but this has been to the detriment of the gifted. It has taken time to develop the programs because the syllabus has to be maintained while GATE activities are being put in place. Is happy the way that this has been done and with the overall philosophical change which has taken place. Acknowledges that they are still finding their way but they have made a very good start.
- With the top 6/7 Maths group, accelerated learning has occurred because the students are being challenged and are not being held back. They are progressing rapidly and the success of the Year 6 students is pushing the Year 7 students to new levels. The students are highly motivated and the teacher commented that one of the students in the group is a student with a behavioural problem in his home class but not in this group. This seems to be because he is challenged and is so focussed on his learning tasks.

Note: When I asked students in the upper ability maths class for Yr 6/7, the two comments quoted below were of importance:

- *In my class, there are slower children and so the work has to be slower. Our teacher says we just have to wait for the others to catch up!*

- *It is really good to work with kids like me!*

5. During the visit, I interviewed thirteen parents as well as meeting with a group of parents on the evening of 3rd April and main points raised were as follows:

- Important for the Enrichment Coordinators to provide ongoing support and ongoing professional development for staff in the Focus Schools;
- There is always the problem of the teacher who does not embrace gifted education. Such teachers can cause the gifted child to be caught between conflicting views and approaches.
- Gate is a very good concept which is working well. It has created an awareness which was not always present before although there still are teachers with negative attitudes;
- Has resulted in changes in classroom strategies and practices with the Maths ability clusters working brilliantly;
- Streaming by ability should go further so that there was extensive ability grouping in the school. This would help to discourage the peer pressure in the regular classroom to not stand out, to not achieve.
- While parents are more informed, it is important to ensure that this is maintained and parent meetings have proved valuable but need to continue;
- Referred to the discrepancy between spending on the gifted and funding for children with special needs and stated, "Our children are children with special needs too!"
- The interface between the Focus School and secondary is a problem with little attention being given to the Focus School background of the Nambour SS students;
- The program means that there is more acceptance of students as being gifted. This has led to gifted students developing more confidence in themselves and have come to believe that they really can do things;
- The program is challenging the gifted students so that they are progressing more rapidly and really like going to school because it makes them think;
- While her daughter had benefited from the withdrawal program, the ability clusters are working extremely well. She commented that she could not understand why anyone would object to ability groupings because in sporting areas such as swimming classes, children are grouped according to ability without any parental or community objections.
- Challenge is the key and the students are being challenged. Is very happy with the program because of the challenge of Advanced Maths, Literacy and TOM. Changed schools because her daughter would finish her set work in two days and then wanted more advanced work which the school felt unable to provide because of the number of special needs children to be provided for, Now she is happy because "she has found here kids just like her!"

6. Five telephone interviews were conducted with Outreach schools and main comments were as follows:

Ms Kathy Lavender, Teacher at Cooroy SS but previously at Chatsworth SS

- Had started a G&T program in her school but it lacked any theoretical foundation. The Focus School directed attention to accountability and an underlying conceptual framework. This was because of the work of the Enrichment Coordinator. She has now developed an Extension program which provides a one and a half hour session on Wednesdays with five week blocks in Maths, Artists and Art, Writer and English. Has evaluated the program and this data is available.

Mr Greg Brand, Principal, Monkland SS

- His school is undergoing dramatic change because the Outreach inservice session at his school sparked the interest of staff because the material presented was practical. There were teachers from some six schools from the Gympie district attending. Has put a G&T program in place and is seeing staff attitudinal changes with them become more aware of gifted children.
- Plans to hold another program on gifted education for his school and other district schools this year.
- Has supported the G&T program in his school as a Curriculum Initiative in his budget.
- The Focus School program has offered a continuity of support which is not available with the sessions offered by visiting experts.

Mr Stuart Spencer, Deputy Principal, Tin Can Bay P-10 SS

- Attended the “Train the Trainer” program conducted at Monklands SS by the Enrichment Coordinator. Considered this to be well presented and at a high level and backed up by an excellent level of support;
- The support from Outreach has been very strong with its mentoring of one of his staff. Regular consultations are available for specific children;
- “Outreach has been a worthwhile find for us!”
- Believes that any step forward in gifted education would be worthwhile but the Focus School concept has been a major step forward which he does not regard as an inequity.
- Has gone beyond the “extension” type provision to one which is built on a much higher level of theorising and thinking about the gifted and their education;
- Has established a 4-5-6 ability class which was “a dream” to work with but at the same time, is finding that the other classes are working better.

Ms Chris Dyer, Principal, Maleny SS

- Together with a staff member did the “Training the Trainer” program which was excellent. Unfortunately they still have to develop a G&T program and has asked for the Enrichment Coordinator to provide a staff session on G&T.
- Does not consider the Focus School program was an inequity but expressed concern that the District funding had ceased.
- Found the Identification Kit to be very useful but their efforts have been limited by time and funding.

7. In the 2000 Report, comprehensive details of the GATE program were provided covering Outreach programs for schools, programs for parents, inservice programs for Focus School staff and activities for students. It should be noted that Nambour SS is a Phase One Focus School. The following details are taken from that 2000 Report:

Activities in the Outreach program were:

- in June 2000, published a second edition of GATE Training package and distributed this to 28 schools in Nambour district for evaluation and feedback;
- in August, adapted training kit in light of evaluation and feedback and presented to 15 teachers at Nambour SS;
- in November, follow up mentoring for teachers using 3rd edition training Kit;
- 5 local outreach schools have utilised the package in training staff in their schools;
- presented training kit at Mondland SS to 12 local teachers,

- visiting schools for ongoing mentoring to schools implementing gifted programs after training session;
- provision of sessions presented by Guest Speakers;
- presentation at AAEGTC Conference with 7 staff from Outreach schools attending the conference;
- Three teachers at Nambour SS invited to present at GERRIC Conference in January, 2001;
- presentations at AISQ Conference;
- maintained GATE website as part of the school's website;
- purchased relevant resource materials including research publications. Note: 22 schools borrowed materials during 2000;
- attendance at Enrichment Coordinators meetings and participation in teleconferences with Enrichment Coordinators;
- maintenance of regular contact with Enrichment Coordinators and Central office by telephone and email.

The report also provided a list of schools involved in the Focus School's Outreach program:

Burnside State High	-	Enquiries and training information
Chatsworth SS	-	Training/mentoring
Cooroy SS	-	Whole school programming and planning/training
Gympie East SS	-	Mentoring, training/ program development
Gympie South SS	-	Training/mentoring
Kia Ora SS	-	Training/mentoring
Kin Kin SS	-	Programming with administration/training
Maleny SS	-	Training
Monkland SS	-	Mentoring/training/program development
Mooloolah SS	-	Mentoring of teachers/training
Nambour State High	-	Training/mentoring
Noosaville SS	-	Mentoring/training
North Arm SS	-	Programming for individual students
Pomona SS	-	Mentoring and programming for individual students staff training
Sunshine Beach State High	-	Program development/training
Tin Can Bay SS	-	Training
Two Mile SS	-	Training/mentoring
Woombye SS	-	Information
Yandina SS	-	Programming and development of teachers/training

Aspects of the ongoing program of professional development and keys activities were:

- assisting teachers in Yrs 3 and 5 with the organisation, implementation and evaluation of two cluster grouping trials;
- development of two differentiated maths curriculum for students at four ability levels;
- assisting in the program development for approximately 100 gifted/highly able students;
- establishing GATE Portfolios for identified gifted students;
- developing with selected staff a blueprint for all gifted programs at the Nambour;
- involvement in evaluation of Training Kits.

Aspects of the ongoing program for parents were:

- formal group meetings replaced by individual meetings;
- provision of a parent representative on the GATE committee;
- Attendance by parents at professional GATE conferences such as Mirarca Gross Training and AAEGT Conference;

Aspects of the GATE Initiative in terms of student learning/activities were:

- identification of 12 new gifted students;
- withdrawal program involving poetry writing, problem solving, and other areas;
- cluster grouping in Year 3 and 5 for maths;
- establishment of GATE News column in School newsletter;
- dissemination of relevant GATE information and articles on request;
- establishment of Enrichment Discussion Group to assist 15 underachieving gifted students;
- participation in TOM with 7 students gaining extensive experience and training in TOM and with the Maths Engineering team winning the State section of TOM and then represented the state in the National finals.

Caloundra State High School, 5th and 6th April

1, During the two day visit to Caloundra SH, the provided the following:

- ◆ Administrative Briefing with the Principal, Mr Kerry Emery, Mr Gary Hay, Learning and Teaching HOD and Ms Margaret Dahlenburg, Principal Enrichment Coordinator;
- ◆ visit to Sports Excellence Program and talked with Mr Roy Brunium Phys. Ed. HOD and two students from the program;

- ◆ visit to Performance Excellence Program and talked with Ms Sue Fox, Performing Arts HOD and Mr Man Cheung, PEP (Performance Excellence Program) teacher. We then watched a short performance by students and then talked with them;
- ◆ meeting with parents of case managed students, and of PEP students as well as representatives from Network schools;
- ◆ meeting with Ms Lorraine Hooper, Home Ec. HOD;
- ◆ meeting with Mr Brad Spring regarding Maths, Science and Marine Studies curriculum development;
- ◆ visit to Advanced Information Technology class and talked with Mr Alan Walker, AIT teacher and Mr Steve Miskin, IT HOD;
- ◆ met with four students for individual discussions: one student has a dual enrolment with the school and University of Sunshine Coast where she is studying Indonesian, and the other students were all accelerated students;
- ◆ ongoing discussions with Ms Dahlenburg, the principal Enrichment Coordinator, and Ms Maggie Shalhoub.

2. Characteristics of the school program in terms of the GATE Initiative:

- has adopted a whole school approach;
- Curriculum Compacting Science;
- Differentiated units of work;
- Performance Excellence Program for identified gifted and talented students in the Performing Arts;
- Professional development package plus stand-alone workshops;
- Sports Excellence Program;
- acceleration;
- dual enrolment with University of Sunshine Coast;
- case management of gifted students;
- development of “Pathways to Excellence” training kit

3. From discussions with senior staff and Enrichment Coordinators the following points emerged:

- The GATE program has meant that there is a much greater acceptance of gifted education as a right of the gifted students and not a luxury:
- GATE has legitimised the area of gifted education.
- In the period 1998-2000, there had been inservice sessions devoted to:
 - thinking skills,
 - Whole Brain learning,
 - learning styles,
 - Multiple Intelligences.

These provided an excellent foundation for the change to becoming a Focus School but it has been a long process to shift from a content focus to a focus and framework on thinking as above, and to providing for the gifted. To embed such a framework for planning cannot be achieved in

a short period and while the school has considerable progress, there is much still to do. It is now in 2001 when the emphasis is on putting ideas and planning into practice.

Workshops have also been provided for parents to keep them abreast of the developments in the school.

- Gifted and talented education is an integral part of the school in the same way that the school has specific needs programs. The specific needs end of the spectrum has received a great deal of attention but it is a whole new issue for the school to attend to the gifted.
 - The school has endeavoured to become a “School of Excellence” and this is consistent with the differentiation discussed in “2010”.
 - In pursuit of excellence it has provided an educational environment which is attracting most of the students from district primary schools.
 - The whole state has to contribute to the Smart State strategy and gifted education is consistent with the goal of “The Smart State”.
 - As a result of the changes which have resulted from being a Focus School, the school is now concentrating on the learner and not on behavioural management.
 - Before the school became a Focus School, it had the potential to become a school for teachers looking forward to retirement. However GATE has opened staff up to new ideas, to experimentation and to re-thinking and this has revitalised staff.
 - An important factor in the change process has been the Open Management Team.
 - Staff attitudes to GATE are very positive.
 - There is a need for Enrichment Coordinators to maintain some teaching commitment. It provides them with confidence in the ideas they are presenting to others and also gives them credibility with other teachers.
 - Training whether for Outreach or for Inreach must be followed by an ongoing contact with the Enrichment Coordinator and other staff in order to talk through GATE implementation.
4. From the meeting with parents the following points were made:
- The group benefits from the Performance Excellence Program are very significant. There is a development of trust, sharing of problems and learning that solutions can be found. *(These comments were consistent with my discussions with students in the program.)*
 - One parent stated that in Primary school, her daughter had been an isolate but GATE at Caloundra SH had given her the opportunity to be with likeminded students. Strengths are being rewarded rather than being damaged by the Tall Poppy syndrome. *“She has learnt to accept her abilities.”*
 - Another parent described how her daughter had suffered in Primary school because she did so well that she was accused of cheating! She was accelerated from Year 7 into Year 9 and this has really been an important and positive step for her.
 - Again comparisons were made between money and attention given to special education compared with the lack of attention for gifted students.
 - The Focus School has provided many opportunities for gifted students and it needs to be continued.

At this same meeting, teachers from Network schools stated that:

- Support from the Enrichment Coordinator and from the school has led to a G&T program being established;
- An important collaboration has developed with some Year 7 students being able to join the Performance Excellence Program;
- Regular contact has been invaluable.
- Outreach has been extremely important and the Focus School has become a valuable resource.

5. Points from the meeting with students were:

- TOM had been important to them because it had provided friendship and having fun together while achieving a goal.
- The Room provided for them by the Enrichment Coordinators had been a sanctuary where they developed friendships and gained in confidence;
- The Enrichment Coordinators had been extremely supportive and caring though there were some teachers who were not so supportive.

It was interesting to find that one of the students in these discussions had written a lengthy letter to Dean Wells, the then Minister for Education, which was later published in the QAGTC Journal, Vol. 20, No 4, October 2000. This very insightful letter will be referred to in a later section of this report.

6. In the 2000 Report, comprehensive details of the GATE program were provided covering Outreach programs for schools, programs for parents, inservice programs for Focus School staff and activities for students. It should be noted Caloundra SH is a Phase One Focus School. The following details are taken from that 2000 Report

Activities in the Outreach program were:

- “Pathways to Excellence” Train the Trainer kit developed;
- two sets of 3 day workshops using the “Pathways to Excellence” Kits conducted with 32 administrators and gifted education key teachers involved;
- two whole staff workshops dealing with Bloom, Multiple Intelligences and Identification in the Classroom Setting;
- assisted a school in the development of a G&T workshop for the whole staff;
- presented modules from “Pathways to Excellence” at Emerald SH in a two day workshop with 9 participants;
- presented at AAEGTC Conference on differentiated curriculum planner and responded to six follow-up request for samples of differentiated kits;
- received a request from Emerald SH to co-present with the Denison Enrichment Coordinator full day workshops in the district;
- visits to schools to provide ongoing support to G&T developments;
- support service link established with three schools not previously involved in focus school support;
- co-planning differentiated units with teachers from three schools;
- sharing of units with other schools on request and as samples in workshop;
- provides books for loan to teachers and parents - 82 books borrowed.
- provides an information service including:
 - Information Hotline dealing with requests for information, resources, professional development, thinking skills, enrichment options, advisory support on provisions for individual students;
 - Media releases by all faculties at Caloundra SH on student achievements;
 - GATE Newsletter
 - GATE pamphlet

Aspects of the ongoing program of professional development and key activities were:

- Whole staff presentation by Enrichment Coordinator on Advanced G&T Identification processes and on Understanding Profiles of Giftedness;

- Middle school Research visits by a team of teachers carrying out a fact finding task regarding research into the inclusive aspects of middle schooling;
- two staff attended the AAEGT Conference;
- three staff attended “Gifted Brain” full day workshop;
- attendance by Enrichment Coordinator at meeting of Enrichment Coordinators in Brisbane.

Aspects of the ongoing program for parents were:

- G&T resource books available for parents to borrow;
- GATE Newsletter,
- GATE information pamphlet,
- Enrichment Orientation evening held in Term 1,
- Enrichment Coordinator available to talk with parents at Yr 7/8 Transition evening,
- Enrichment Coordinator participates in Year 8 parent interview evening,
- counselling service provided for parents of highly gifted students through case management process,
- Information/advice provided to parents outside the school community including prospective enrolments,
- provided a display at Sunland Shopping Centre about talent development opportunities at the school.

Aspects of the GATE Initiative in terms of student learning/activities were:

- full day Environmental workshop as part of Day of Excellence;
- 14 talented primary students from feeder schools in the Junior Performance Excellence Program along with identified talented students from Year 8-10;
- Involvement of outside experts in dance, drama and physical theatre workshops;
- Involvement in musical production, Drama Festival, Talent Quest, vocal workshops;
- two students enrolled in subjects at the University of the Sunshine Coast under the “Enhanced Studies Program” for gifted students;
- acceleration as appropriate;
- subject extensions;
- two editions of student newspaper;
- Student Newspaper entered into and won Minister for Education/Courier Mail Award. Editor won award for best editorial;
- cluster of 6-8 gifted students into Yr 8 and Yr 9 mixed ability classes;
- Performance Excellence Program;
- Excellence program in volleyball and touch football to be offered in 2001.

Denison State School - 26th and 27th April

1. During the two day visit to Denison SS, the program provided the following:
 - ◆ Administrative Briefing with the Principal, Ms Jill Ridgway, Ms Felicity Bezer, Emerald District Enrichment Coordinator and Ms Kathy Sheppard, Denison Enrichment Coordinator;
 - ◆ Parent forum;
 - ◆ Visits to classrooms and discussions with staff;
 - ◆ Student Forum;
 - ◆ Discussions with Ms Di Nicol, Student Services. Emerald District Office;
 - ◆ meeting with staff;
 - ◆ telephone discussions with principals, teachers and parents;
 - ◆ meeting with Ms Janne McCowan, Principal, Blackwater North SS
 - ◆ ongoing discussions with the Enrichment Coordinators and the Principal.

2. Characteristics of the school program in terms of GATE Initiative:

- whole school approach to G&T provision and differentiation;
- multi-age philosophy:
- Thinking skills, de Bono, Bloom, Multiple Intelligences a framework for curriculum planning and for student and staff profiling;
- activities to expand student interests embedded in both whole school and classroom programming;
- Minds Alive Program;
- Individual lesson plans:
- Units of work.
- grouping of students according to their individual needs;

3, From the discussions with the Principal, the two Enrichment Coordinators and later Ms Nicol, District Office the following points emerged:

- Ms Bezer began as the Enrichment Coordinator for Denison School but the need for Outreach became so great and her reputation had become so high, that principals of schools sought to have her position made a District Office one even though she remained at Denison SS. This then meant that a second Enrichment Coordinator was required at Denison. The two Enrichment Coordinators work as a team sharing the G&T work.
- Emerald is regarded as a training district with:
 - 17/34 principals are new;
 - there is a very large turnover of staff with many of the staff coming to Emerald as new teachers who move on after the necessary number of years have passed;
 - very high travel costs as illustrated by the fact that specialist teachers travel approximately 950 km per week at an average cost of \$1000 per trip.
- Denison SS has the problem of high turnover of staff which means that G&T training or staff is ongoing;
- Because of the fluidity of staffing, it is necessary to build in a change factor to allow for the program to continue despite changes of:
 - Principal
 - Enrichment Coordinator,
 - staff.

The problem of staff turnover is a serious one because it is a long process to develop positive attitudes, understanding, and ways of planning curriculum, strategies and learning environments. This makes G&T a fragile development unless some core stability can be established for a number of years. It also makes it essential for continuity in the Enrichment Coordinator positions.

- GATE is all about good teaching practice;
- In terms of funding for GATE, it is the Enrichment Coordinator position which is the critical component for funding plus travel costs for that position.;
- Program is characterised by the acceptance of difference without dumbing down the gifted by requiring bland conformity. This is an outcome which was not predicted but has been achieved.
- Parents are more comfortable and have become partners in education.

4. From discussions with staff together with telephone interviews, the following points emerged:
- had seven new staff in 2000 so needed a great deal of Professional development. Is taking a whole school approach and staff have been released for this. Staff are developing with the less enthusiastic starting to realise that this is about good teaching practice. Has been a great resource to have Ms Bezer providing support and modelling who has the ability when working with students to have the worst become the best. However is finding that as the G&T develops, some parents are enrolling because of this. **(This demonstrates the powerful need felt by parents of gifted students.)**
 - The PERSON is the key and you need this when planning. Hence the powerful role of the Enrichment Coordinator.
 - Focus school has provided inservice to a small town (Biloela) which is otherwise out of reach of quality inservice;
 - after an inservice on GATE provided by the Enrichment Coordinator, it really is necessary to have a special person or persons to take responsibility in the school.
 - Staff have gained something they didn't have before and have taken it into their teaching. They are able to plan for all children but with the gifted being able to move ahead without boundaries. What the Enrichment Coordinator has provided is not "A Day on G&T" but instead an ongoing process.
 - Denison staff member talked about how she had years of teaching experience in traditional schools before coming to Denison. Teaching at Denison had changed her life because she had been forced to re-think what she had been doing and this has revitalised her teaching, She stated that she feels more successful and is enjoying her teaching more than ever before.
 - Another teacher in his second year stated that he had learnt a great deal while being at Denison and believed that when he moved to another school, what he had learnt at Denison would stay with him.
 - Parent comment: **If we handicap the gifted, then the future consequences are terrible.**

5 A group of gifted students worked on a de Bono Reflection Sheet and responses are of interest:

Question: How do you feel when you take part in enrichment/extension activities and lessons with thinking skills:

Responses: excited, proud, brilliant, special, privileged, overwhelmed,
happy, curious, surprised, talented, included, interested, anxious, rapt, good
about myself

Question: How would schools be different if enrichment and extension activities weren't offered or only now and then?

Responses:

- i. We would become bored and eventually we would not want to learn or come to school. The teachers would be stressed.
- ii. Make life boring at school. It makes things uninteresting. You wouldn't want to go to school. Teachers wouldn't be happy because they would be teaching in one way. Teachers wouldn't want to teach.
- iii. Our talents wouldn't be recognised. The teachers and students would be bored.
- iv. We wouldn't want to come to school if all the teachers just stand in front of the class and talk. That would be annoying! We wouldn't be able to go outside and express our Smarts and our feelings.

Question: What would the Queensland Government need to do? What resources would they need? When should this happen?

Response:

We don't have to learn what we already now. We approve of this program and our group wholeheartedly wants this program to stay open because we're the future!

6. In the 2000 Report, comprehensive details of the GATE program were provided covering Outreach programs for schools, programs for parents, inservice programs for Focus School staff and activities for students. It should be noted Denison SS is a Phase Two Focus School. The following details are taken from that 2000 Report.

Activities in the Outreach program were:

- Enrichment Coordinator began process of encouraging schools to participate in the development of a District Network - GATE;
- workshops organised for schools on request;
- development by Enrichment Coordinator of training materials for use in workshop presentations:
 - Back to Basics,
 - An Introduction to Gifted Education,
 - The Lifelong Learning Path,
 - The Multiple Intelligence Way to Thinking and Learning,
 - Multiple Intelligences - Early Childhood,
 - de Bono - an introduction to six ways of thinking,
 - de Bono - the six thinking lights,
 - Bloom's Taxonomy,
 - Are we there yet? Questioning for thinking and learning,
 - Learning Styles and Modalities;
- Training modules made available to schools for internal use with Enrichment Coordinator following up with sessions with individual teachers or teaching teams focussed on a specific area,
- Use of reflection and evaluation sheets for workshop participants to assist in ongoing refinement of workshop program and to assist in determining future needs for longterm planning of Outreach program;
- development of resource collection for schools to borrow;

- establishment of a 3-school mini-network with regular support provided by Enrichment Coordinator;
- Enrichment Coordinator has facilitated process of staff in mini-network schools as well as others in the district and beyond allowing Enrichment Coordinator to share units of work, learning centre ideas and matrixes;
- development by Enrichment Coordinator of a District Talent Register to track staff with specific areas of talent;
- participation by 20 staff in Minds Alive workshop, “Multiage - a tool for differentiation”;
- participation by 10 staff in Minds Alive, “Tournament of Minds Training Workshop”;
- participation by 20 staff in Minds Alive, “Science Alive”
- Enrichment Coordinator modeling GATE teaching in 8 schools as part of training program.

Aspects of the ongoing program of professional development and keys activities were:

- administration of staff survey to determine at which level each teacher is operating at in terms of the Queensland Model for Gifted Education and Talent Development;
- use of staff survey to determine needs and to match with appropriate workshops and conferences;
- involvement of individual staff according to their own stage of development in assisting in training of other staff;
- professional development for new staff.

Aspects of the ongoing program for parents were:

- development of GATE website by parent representative and Enrichment Coordinator: attended two-day workshop on website development and then worked together on the site;
- involvement of parents in “Back to Basics” inservice program provide to Biloela District;
- parent information evenings in the Emerald District and at Atherton;
- development of Parent Profile to identify expertise and interests of parents which could be utilised in GATE program,

Aspects of the GATE Initiative in terms of student learning/activities were:

- Minds Alive - Thinking Skills and problem solving using technical LEGO - 300 students participated;
- Minds Alive - Tournament of Minds Training workshop - 40 students participated;
- Minds Alive - Science Alive! - 300 students participated;
- enrichment and extension activities embedded in school and classroom programs.

Additional information provided for Term One, 2001:

- planning meeting with staff in 2 schools,
- discussions in 6 schools to outline Enrichment Coordinator support in development of gifted education;
- modelling of lessons in 2 schools;
- provided support in one school to classroom teacher, to parents of gifted child and to the school’s Enrichment Coordinator;
- established GOTCHA! Network and organised first GOTCHA! Network Day;
- participated in:
 - “Effective Facilitation Skills Workshop”,
 - Enrichment Coordinators meetings and teleconferences
 - QAGTC Conference.

4. Evaluation of the Focus Schools as a Component of GATE Initiative

4.1 Introductory Comments

The first objective of this review was to:

Review and evaluate, in terms of outcomes and outputs, the present Focus Schools approach to provision of, and furthering professional development in, gifted and talented education.

The use of Outcomes and Outputs is a valid basis for reviewing and evaluating if:

- a) these Outcomes and Outputs had been determined with precision prior to the Focus Schools being established,
- b) the Focus Schools had known what the expected outcomes and outputs were; and
- c) key staff in the Focus Schools had been provided with inservice in terms of what the outcomes and outputs were and what techniques could assist in the preparation of reports on outcomes and outputs.

An examination of relevant documents provided gave rise to a number of concerns. There were actually several statements of outcomes but only one statement of outputs.

In a document headed, "Gifted and Talented Project" bearing a document date of 1998, the outcomes were stated as follows:

- More teachers are trained in gifted education
- More teachers are actively seeking gifts and talents in their children and are skilled in meeting the needs of students with gifts and talents.
- More school administrators are organising to facilitate flexible progression according to student ability and rate of learning.
- More students are identified as potentially gifted.
- More gifted and talented students are provided with appropriate curriculum services.

However, in the 1999 document, "Focus Schools: Implementation Guide, 1997-1999", the outcomes are now expanded as follows:

Student Outcomes

Students with gifts and talents will benefit from participation in gifted education because:

1. more students are identified as potentially gifted and talented;
2. a wider range of gifts and talents are recognised and valued;
3. students have access to more options inclusive of their learning styles and pace of learning;
4. students have increased control over and responsibility for their learning

School Outcomes

There will be broad recognition of, and curriculum provision for a range of ability-related educational needs of students because:

1. all school staff have increased awareness and knowledge about gifted education;
2. all school staff are actively involved in the identification and recognition of potentially gifted individuals in a variety of areas;
3. teachers implement gifted education and create a supportive environment for gifted and talented students which includes a differentiated curriculum in the classroom;
4. schools include parents in their planning to support improvements in provision for gifted and talented;
5. schools document their processes and account for funding allocations.

Community Outcomes

There will be broad recognition of, and willingness to support a range of ability-related educational needs of students because:

1. parents and community have increased awareness and knowledge of gifted education and the needs of potentially gifted students;
2. parents and community are involved in identifying and providing for a variety of manifestations of gifts and talents in students, e.g. through mentoring
3. parents and community are aware of the Focus School program.

A consideration of these two sets of outcomes suggests that the first are outcomes for the Focus School Initiative whereas the second set provides the outcomes which each Focus School should be meeting. However, nowhere in any document provided to me is this made clear.

The 1998 “Gifted and Talented Project” document also sets down the following statement of Outputs:

- Refinement of curriculum model for gifted education
- Refinement of identification model for students with gifts and talents
- Professional development provided to school personnel
- Outreach programs from phase one Focus Schools
- Report on measuring progress in whole-school GATE planning and implementation and student outcomes

However the later document, “Focus Schools: Implementation Guide, 1997-1999” makes no reference to Outputs and since this was an Implementation Guide, it could be assumed that outputs were no longer of interest.

To add to this lack of clarity, neither the 1998 Report, “GATE Phase Two” nor the 1999 Focus School Report, “Distinctive Schools: State Schools Looking After Students with Gifts and Talents” presents any information on either outcomes and outputs, at least in a detailed way, which relates to the statements of outcomes and outputs discussed previously.

It would appear then that the outcomes and outputs, although defined, have not been used in key documents with a consistency and a precision which provides a useful framework for the Focus Schools. Then in the November 2nd letter to Principals from Mr McHugh, Assistant Director-General, there is no reference to outputs. Instead, Mr McHugh asks for a report which “*must outline the outcomes achieved by students, for staff and the community of your school and those schools which you have supported*”.

While each Focus School reported at the end of 2000 as required, the format was not consistent and this demonstrates the importance when establishing a new initiative such as the Focus Schools of ensuring that the participants in the initiative:

- understand and accept the aims and objectives of the initiative;
- know clearly what outcomes are expected; and
- are trained in the methods of data collection and data analysis which will enable them to determine how well they have achieved the set objectives.

Indeed this was a concern expressed by Enrichment Coordinators who as a group would argue that they have carried out with enthusiasm whatever tasks have been asked or required of them. However, better preparation and training in the complexities of their role would have eliminated some of the unnecessary and wasteful “discovery learning” which has resulted and would have ensured that they were trained in a range of methods for “measuring” the success or otherwise of the GATE Initiative.

There is a further aspect of the evaluation of a program/project which will be discussed when considering student outcomes.

4.2 School Outcomes achieved by the Focus Schools

This section considers the School Outcomes set down for the Focus Schools and the extent to which these have been achieved.

School Outcomes

There will be broad recognition of, and curriculum provision for a range of ability-related educational needs of students because:

- 1. all school staff have increased awareness and knowledge about gifted education;**

The most serious barrier to effective provisions for gifted students is that of negative attitudes of teachers, in particular, but also of parents of children who are not gifted. Neutral attitudes, too, create problems because these lead to a less than enthusiastic response to changes in the curriculum and in the strategies appropriate to the changed curriculum. Negative and neutral attitudes about gifted children are usually the result of a lack of knowledge about giftedness, inaccuracy in the little that is known, and a lack of understanding of the realities of giftedness and the problems which the gifted student so often faces.

Consequently, no provisions for gifted students can come into effect and become embedded into the life of the school unless the problem of attitudes is dealt with. While the aim must always be to eliminate negative attitudes and neutral ones, the reality is that in many cases the process of change is a slow one while regrettably, there are some whose attitudes seem impervious to the effects of knowledge, rational argument or practical demonstration.

Knowledge is needed for attitudinal changes but this has to focus initially on the nature of giftedness and on exploring such issues as::

- what it is meant by referring to a student as being “gifted”,
- the frequency of its occurrence in the population,
- the common myths about giftedness,
- the common characteristics of gifted people,
- implications of giftedness for interpersonal relations;
- implications of giftedness for education.

In each Focus School, there was an intense and extensive program of professional development in gifted education as a preparation for the planning stage of development. This was followed by an ongoing program which enabled schools to expand their range of provisions with much of this reflecting a progression through the Model of Curriculum Provision which has evolved from the Zigzag and Unicorn programs. These programs were conducted by the Enrichment Coordinators, the GATE Project Officer, visiting experts in aspects of gifted education.

In each school, provision has been made for the inservicing of teachers newly appointed to the staff but the extent of this professional development has varied greatly. For some Focus Schools, the annual staff change is limited to only one or two teachers whereas for schools such as Denison, Mackay North and Townsville, staff changes are much greater. This has meant that while in every school, there is ongoing

professional development in gifted education, schools with large staff changes must annually provide a basic program in gifted education. This pressure has been relieved to some extent by having new staff participate in Outreach programs for teachers from other schools. All schools required new staff to attend these professional development sessions but invited other staff to attend.

In addition to programs for developing knowledge and understanding of giftedness, professional development programs in all Focus Schools have provided for:

- Identification of gifted students,
- Approaches to thinking such as Bloom's Taxonomy, William's Taxonomy, de Bono's Six Hats, Gardner's Multiple Intelligences,
- Curriculum Compaction,
- Unit Planning,
- Differentiation strategies,
- Planning workshops specific to particular areas as determined for each school.

In addition, the programs have provided for topics/activities more specific to the particular school:

- Autonomous Learner (Robertson SS)
- Democratic Vertically Inclusive Curriculum (Townsville SH)
- Navigation Education (Townsville SH)
- GLEAM (Group for Learning Enrichment Activities, Mackay) workshops (Mackay North),
- evaluation of Training Kits (Nambour)
- Staff Profiling (Denison).

The Year 2000 reports presented by the Focus Schools provide a detailed picture of ongoing professional development for all staff and with special attention being given to the newly appointed staff.

There are two questions to be asked and the first of these relates directly to the outcome statement: **Do staff at the Focus Schools have an increased awareness and knowledge about gifted education?**

There is an inherent problem in the Outcome statement which needs comment. The use of the word, "increased" in the statement calls for a comparison between what the level of awareness and knowledge about gifted education was **before** staff were given a comprehensive program of professional development on gifted education and what it is now. To answer this, I would need data from each school showing the state of awareness and knowledge about gifted education of staff **prior** to the program of professional development they then experienced. This data would have to be compared with data showing what the levels of awareness and knowledge were **after** experiencing the program. While such data would have been most useful in program evaluation, the importance of such data should have been dealt with in the initial preparation/training of the Enrichment Coordinators. The ways of collecting data, how to analyse and interpret data should not be left to chance if at a subsequent stage of a program, evaluations or reviews are to be made which would benefit from pre- and post-program data being available.

The absence of such data does not mean the question cannot be answered because there are other sources of information of a more subjective nature:

- discussions with principals and Enrichment Coordinators,
- discussion with teachers,
- observation of classrooms,
- discussions with parents, and
- discussions with students.

However, this approach requires the order of consideration of outcome statements to be varied,

The first statement refers to **awareness** and **knowledge**, the next to **identification** of gifted students, and the third refers to **implementation** of gifted programs, a **supportive** environment and **differentiated** curriculum. The approach I have taken is to ask the following questions:

- Are staff implementing gifted education programs which are creating a supportive environment for gifted students and which are using curriculum differentiation?
- Are teachers involved in the identification of gifted students?

If there is evidence to enable the answer to be in the affirmative, then I must assume that teachers are aware of and have knowledge of gifted education. Of course it is *possible* for a teacher to “identify” gifted children and to provide “programs” for them without having any theoretical foundation in gifted education. Unfortunately, the less knowledge and understanding underpinning the identification processes and program provision, the less appropriate and the less defensible such practices and provisions will be.

School Outcomes

3. **teachers implement gifted education and create a supportive environment for gifted and talented students which includes a differentiated curriculum in the classroom;**

The Year 2000 Reports from each of the Focus Schools show that they are implementing gifted education. While a summary of what is being provided at each school has been set out in the previous section of the report, the following examines the range of programs now in place:

- Thinking**, as in de Bono’s Six Hats , Bloom’s Taxonomy, William’s Taxonomy and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences, has become a major characteristic of the programs in all schools. The various approaches to thinking are being used as a framework for curriculum planning and has enables **differentiation** to become a meaningful term to describe variations in content and strategies to match the different abilities and learning styles of individual children.

I was able to view examples of matrices to be used in the application of a thinking skills frame work when planning. Documents of this type were in use when staff were planning learning experiences in their own classrooms; when co-operatively planning units or programs with other staff. The extent to which the thinking skills framework was in use throughout each school indicated that in each school , learning experiences were being planned with a thoroughness which could only come from knowledge, understanding and confidence.

Classrooms, too, reflected the role thinking was playing in the program. Charts of the various thinking approaches were on walls but from my visits to these rooms and observing teachers working with their students, it was clear that these were not charts hung for decorative purposes but were there to assist student understanding and as a constant tool for learning and a guide for student focus. Discussions with teachers and listening to the classroom interactions between teachers and students, these thinking frameworks had become a very important feature of the language of learning. Students well used to de Bono knew immediately what it meant to use the different hats in their thinking while students, versed in Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences, were able to talk about themselves in terms of which “Smarts” they were and what this meant for learning.

One of the powerful consequences of working with thinking as the underlying framework for learning is that differences in the ways of thinking of individuals in a class and differences in the speed or otherwise of thinking from individual to individual confront teachers with the strongest reasons for why the curriculum must be differentiated. As a result, planning in the Focus Schools is not just a matter of organising curriculum content according to the framework of thinking. Understanding thinking and observing thinking differences in their own classrooms has meant that teachers are organising to provide learning experiences which take into account critical differences in thinking.

A most important feature of the differentiation to be found in the Focus Schools is that **all** children are benefiting. So an initiative which was primarily designed for the gifted is having important effects on other students **without reducing the challenge** of what the gifted students are doing.

No Focus School would claim that every teacher is working well with this emphasis on thinking. It is an approach which challenges teachers to re-examine the way they plan learning and the strategies they use to promote this learning. However, the principals and the coordinators all stated their belief that the greater majority of the staff were developing increasing confidence in

the use of thinking frameworks. To this observer, it was very evident that these schools were making significant changes in the learning environment, changes which appeared to be benefiting all. It was also evident that for this to have had happened, then the majority of teachers were working with this focus on thinking.

My discussion with parents indicated that the language of thinking had been communicated to them and was in many homes also being used in family discourse. It was evident that parents believed that the focus on thinking and the differentiation of learning which had emerged from the attention to thinking was a very positive development of the school and not just of a few enthusiastic teachers.

ii **Curriculum Compacting** is a characteristic of the programs for gifted students in all Focus Schools and its acceptance has been made easier by the previously discussion emphasis on thinking and on differentiation. Of course, the argument for curriculum compacting is found in three significant characteristics of gifted people:

- they learn quickly and easily;
- they need little or no time for practice in order to store information in memory,
- they process information rapidly.

These characteristics are the ones which most clearly reveal the nature of giftedness and most strongly indicate why differentiation is necessary in curriculum planning and determining appropriate teaching strategies.

Compacting challenges lockstep approaches to learning and its acceptance is dependent on understanding the nature of giftedness especially in terms of the way gifted students think. The extent to which the Focus Schools are utilising curriculum compacting is yet another indication that staff are operating on a knowledge and understanding level appropriate for such a development to have taken place.

iii **Acceleration** of particular gifted students has been provided in all Focus Schools. From discussions with the Principals and the Enrichment Coordinators, acceleration had worked very well but from documentation provided and from these discussions, the success of the acceleration provision was the very careful manner in which it had been implemented. No decision was made without

- an examination of the child's performance in school learning
- performance on various objective measures usually including an assessment of intellectual functioning,
- discussions with parents, the teacher in whose class the child currently was, and the teacher who would receive the child,
- the student who was being considered for acceleration.

The processes used were sound and in accordance with the Departmental policy on acceleration. They were also consistent with the procedures recommended in major writings on provisions for gifted students.

While it is to be expected that correct procedures would have been used given the expertise of the Enrichment Coordinators, acceptance by staff will be in direct relationship with the extent to which staff are have "awareness and knowledge about gifted education". When this awareness and knowledge is lacking, acceleration is more likely to be opposed by staff for reasons such as:

- child is socially immature;
- children who are accelerated are more likely to experience difficulty in teenage than if they remain with their age cohort;
- children who are accelerated are more likely to "burn-out" at high school.

In a minority of cases, the first of these statements might be a valid basis for rejecting acceleration but this would only be the case where there has been a very rational determination of what is meant by "social immaturity" and a determination of what behaviours demonstrate this problem. Usually the claim of social immaturity is made on the basis that the child lacks friends in the age peer group and this actually demonstrates a serious lack of knowledge and understanding of giftedness since that knowledge and understanding would have meant teachers knew that the problem of peer group friendships is a reflection of the social maturity of gifted students, and this is well supported by research.

The second and third statements frequently expressed in terms of "Research shows that. . ." are belief statements completely unsubstantiated by research and therefore statements which reveal a great lack of knowledge about the gifted.

Acceleration, despite being strongly supported by research, does not happen easily for many gifted students. Discussions with parents during the school visits revealed a number of examples of refusals of some principals to accelerate gifted students and it was this reason that the parents had transferred their child to the Focus School. In my discussions with parents at the QAGTC Conference, acceleration was a major issue with parents having acceleration either being in theory available but in practice, prevented by the use of the arguments reflected in the three statements above or being not even considered as a viable option.

That acceleration is not readily provided is well-known to the QAGTC Counsellors and to all who respond to phone calls from parents seeking advice and help. It is also well noted in my own work with gifted children and their parents.

The acceptance of acceleration by staff in the Focus Schools must be treated as an indicator of the knowledge staff have acquired.

- iv Ability clustering** is being used in all Focus schools though this varies from ability clusters within particular classrooms, ability classes for specific subjects and full-time class for gifted students. It would seem that as staff work more with curriculum differentiation resulting from an emphasis on thinking, there is a greater acceptance of the benefits of at least some form of ability clustering. While ability clustering is the provision for gifted students which has the greatest support in research, it is a provision which frequently generates strong negative reactions though such reactions do not reflect awareness or knowledge of giftedness.

Discussions with parents and with teachers at the Focus Schools demonstrated strong support for ability clustering as one form of provision for gifted students. Indeed the use of ability clustering together with the strong support for it surprised me because it was not something I expected to see or to find supported, and supported to the extent that people were saying: Let's have more!

While there are other aspects of the programs being provided in the Focus Schools, it is the above areas of thinking, differentiation, curriculum compacting, acceleration and ability clustering which are the most significant. All of these challenge existing practice and demand a high level of participation and commitment. For such approaches to be in place in the Focus Schools is a significant achievement. However it is more than a matter of having these approaches in place, it is the extent to which the Focus Schools are stimulating learning environments in which there is a sense of enthusiasm and a willingness to innovate, to try new ideas.

- v Extension Activities** are being offered by each school and these include activities such as:

- TOM
- Days of Excellence
- Individual Educational Programs,
- dual enrolment, that is, secondary and university,
- Thinkfest
- special subject-related activities such as Science Olympiad, PEP (Performance Excellence Program)
- Writers and Artist Camps
- Minds Alive

The evidence from the Focus School Reports and from my discussions and observation shows clearly that the Focus Schools have implemented programs for gifted children which have required major changes to the school and classroom organisation, to the curriculum and to teaching strategies. An important characteristic of their programs is curriculum differentiation and this means that the programs are impacting in a positive way on all students and not just on the gifted. The provisions for the gifted represent a major change in the way we are endeavouring to cater for their needs. Most attempts to provide for the gifted in the past have emphasised providing enrichment activities either in the regular classroom or in a withdrawal program. The first approach is the most difficult to achieve and the second is not supported by research. Neither impacted on the school as a whole and enrichment in the classroom was usually associated with a small number of enthusiastic teachers and only was to be found in their classrooms. The Focus Schools are showing ways in which the curriculum can be differentiated

in order to provide challenging learning experiences for gifted children in various settings and to do this in ways which also challenges all students to strive for the excellence appropriate to their abilities.

However School Outcomes Statement 2, , refers to “a supportive environment for gifted and talented children”. In reporting on my visits to each of the Focus Schools, I referred in outlining the program at Eagle Junction to the “whole school approach characterised by a culture of **acceptance of difference**”. This acceptance of difference was evident in all schools and it was particularly reflected in my discussions with parents and with gifted students. While it is true that there were indications that not all teachers were supportive of gifted students, this must be expected since not all teachers, despite extensive professional development on gifted education, have reached a stage of acceptance of giftedness and the needs which are a consequence of giftedness. It must also be accepted that there will be a small number of teachers who are unlikely to become accepting and supportive.

Yet the picture which has emerged is that the overwhelming majority of staff in the Focus Schools are endeavouring to create a learning environment in which the gifted child is supported. These students are enjoying the challenges of the programs being offered and are happy going to school and parents confirm that this is so. There is a sense of great relief being expressed by parents when they talk about the enthusiasm for school and the increased happiness of their children when for many, there was the distress of having children who went unwillingly to school, who complained constantly of being bored and who seemed to find school an unhappy experience. These are views reflected in discussions with me and in letters received from parents at the Focus Schools.

The acceptance of difference which is permeating the ethos of the Focus Schools is helping gifted students to be comfortable in who they are and the special characteristics they have which create significant differences in them, differences which have not always been recognised and catered for. These are now students who have learnt that “It’s okay to be smart!” as it was expressed to me. The strength of the supportive environments in the Focus School is that acceptance of difference and recognition that “It’s all right to be smart” have not created pockets of gifted students isolated from the rest and regarded in negative ways because of their abilities. Whole School approach and differentiation are providing opportunities for all children to be **engaged in learning** and this enables children to have positive experiences at levels appropriate to their abilities. This must be regarded as a major achievement of the Focus Schools though it must be understood that this is such a fundamental change to a school that we cannot expect this change to have become fully embedded in the period of a limited number of years. The process is a continuing one which is evolving in response to the characteristics of particular school environments. However because it is a continuing process, then the Focus Schools are leading the way and through the knowledge gained from their experience, they are able to make the process less difficult for other schools.

Conclusion: The evidence gained from Reports, from discussions with principals, Enrichment Coordinators, staff, parents and students and from observations in classrooms has shown convincingly that the Focus Schools have met the Outcome:

Teachers implement gifted education and create a supportive environment for gifted and talented students which includes a differentiated curriculum in the classroom.

School Outcomes

2. all school staff are actively involved in the identification and recognition of potentially gifted individuals in a variety of areas

All schools are using identification procedures which include the UNICORN Model of Identification set out in pamphlet published by Education Queensland, “UNICORN Model of Identification” (Undated). The model uses what is commonly referred to as the “Bubble-up” method which is set out in detail in “A Model for Curriculum Provisions for Gifted Education and Talent Development”(Edn Qld, 2000):

- a) At the first stage, activities designed to expand the interests of students are provided to all students. Students are observed and ones who meet certain criteria are selected for the second stage activities.
- b) At the next stage of the model, activities are now provided which involve higher level thinking “to extend students’ opportunities to participate in school and regional events or competitions”. Again teacher observations are made of specific students, that is, those previously identified, and students are rated against selection criteria for participation in withdrawal programs.

- c) In the third stage, challenges are provided “that involve inclusive learning/teaching practices and promote development of thinking and feeling focussed on teaching all students to use advanced skills and processes which match students’ learning needs and learning styles”. Again, the teacher observes specific students and rates them against selection criteria for an individualised program.
- d) At the final stage, the teacher provides “individual or small group activities where students are challenged at high levels to further develop their talents to their full potential”. It is at this stage that student products and performances are assessed by teachers, parents or experts and then an Individual Student Profile is developed using information obtained from checklists , tests of intelligence, achievement and creativity, anecdotal records and grades. Students identified through this process are given access to a negotiated curriculum.

The “bubble-up” method used in the Unicorn Model is complex and not without its problems. *(This will be discussed in some detail in the final section of the Report.)* Focus Schools generally have modified this method but as well have introduced other identification instruments such as checklists developed by major writers in the field of gifted education. While objective tests such as intelligence tests and standardised tests of subject achievement are used to some extent, teacher observations plays a major role. Nonetheless, in most schools, the concern was expressed that the identification methods used *may* have caused some gifted students to be overlooked. This is always a concern no matter what identification instruments are used and especially when teacher observation has played such a major role. The problem with teacher observation is that teacher attitudes can influence subjective judgments leading to students who conform more to a particular teacher’s image of “good” students being identified as gifted while more troublesome and/or nonconformist students are usually overlooked. However research studies have demonstrated that the accuracy of teacher judgments based on observation can be considerably improved by:

- the use of well-designed checklists
- professional development on the nature of giftedness and its identification

Since defensible programs for the gifted must involve identification of these students and since each Focus School is using a whole school approach to gifted education, then it is evident that teachers are involved in the process of identifying gifted students. Details provided to me both in writing and through discussions have shown that identification involves a set of procedures with at least some of these requiring teacher judgments such as nomination for specific programs and completion of checklists. At no school is the identification of the gifted carried out by the Enrichment Coordinator working alone. In all cases, it is a team process planned and conducted by the Enrichment Coordinator.

Conclusion: The evidence gained from Reports, from discussions with principals, Enrichment Coordinators, staff, parents and students and from observations in classrooms has shown convincingly that the Focus Schools have met the Outcome:

all school staff are actively involved in the identification and recognition of potentially gifted individuals in a variety of areas

School Outcomes

- 1. all school staff have increased awareness and knowledge about gifted education**

I have previously indicated that in the absence of pre- and post-professional development data, this Outcome has to be addressed with these two questions:

- a) Are staff implementing gifted education programs which are creating a supportive environment for gifted students and which are using curriculum differentiation?
- b) Are teachers involved in the identification of gifted students?

In the above sections, I have reviewed the data available to me and concluded not only that teachers in the Focus Schools are implementing gifted programs which are supportive and which involve curriculum differentiation but also that teachers are actively involved in a range of processes used to identify gifted students. It follows then that staff must have an awareness and knowledge about gifted education. As I have previously indicated, it is not possible for me determine whether this awareness and knowledge is at a level which is greater than it had been prior to the extensive professional development programs they have been given.

However, what has been achieved in the Focus Schools is of a quality and a range that could only have been made possible by a very strong knowledge base on the part of the staff. Of course, it is the Enrichment Coordinators who have provided the leadership but all who have been involved in gifted education know that even dynamic leadership by a Coordinator cannot achieve significant gains if staff are unaware and lacking in knowledge of giftedness and gifted education.

Now if this awareness and knowledge does not represent an increased level, then the Focus Schools must by some chance have been staffed by teachers with a higher level of knowledge of giftedness than would be found in the majority of schools. It is more reasonable to assume that the present level of the teachers' awareness and knowledge of gifted education represents an increase over the level prior to their extensive professional development programs.

Conclusion: the success of the Focus Schools in achieving Outcomes 2 and 3 provide strong evidence that Outcome 1 has been achieved, namely:

all school staff have increased awareness and knowledge about gifted education;

School Outcomes

4. schools include parents in their planning to support improvements in provision for gifted and talented
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The Year 2000 Reports show that in the Focus Schools, parents are not viewed as “pushy parents” who are a constant source of problems but instead have become partners in the education of their children. In the discussions with parents even when a concern was expressed it was done so in a positive way reflecting this sense of partnership and not reflecting antagonistic stances.

The reports show a range of activities designed to keep parents informed and involved:

- attending AAEGTC Conference with members of staff,
- information sessions,
- newsletters,
- assisting in website development,
- provision of resource and reference material to parents,
- provision of counselling services.
- participation in activities such as Thinkfest, TOM,
- participation in workshops and seminars,
- parent representation on GATE Committees,
- Parent Profile to identify expertise and interests of parents which could be used in GATE programs

In addition, all schools involve parents in classrooms providing aide-type assistance to teachers.

Of course, an important indication of the extent to which parents are involved in the life of the Focus Schools is the way that they have become and remain very determined advocates for gifted education and in particular for the Focus Schools. Certainly, my discussions with parents in groups and individually have indicated that the activities outlined in the 2000 Year Report have been well received by them and have given them a greater understanding of gifted education and what the Focus Schools are doing for their gifted children.

Conclusion:

The extent to which parents are partners in the education of their gifted children demonstrates the achievement of Outcome 4:

Schools include parents in their planning to support improvements in provision for gifted and talented

School Outcomes

5. schools document their processes and account for funding allocations.

Each Focus School has prepared reports as required and these have been made available to me. Indeed they have been invaluable in the preparation of this report. In addition, at each Focus School I was given a large folder containing details of their programs. Each Enrichment Coordinator had files of records setting out the development of the school’s programs for gifted education together with feedback sheets from teachers and parents from the various workshops and seminars which had been provided by the Focus School. Unfortunately the time provided for this report did not allow for more than a sampling of some of this material.

In terms of the Focus Schools accounting for their funding, this not a matter for this review since such accounting would be a requirement of Education Queensland and would have been provided as requested in order to satisfy audit requirements as well as to prepare for budget submissions.

Conclusion

The Focus Schools have provided evidence in the way of reports and the materials prepared for me of the way that they have and continue to document their processes. Accounting for funds must be assumed to have been done for the reasons noted above.

Schools document their processes and account for funding allocations.

4.3 **Student Outcomes for Focus Schools**

This section considers the School Outcomes set down for the Focus Schools and the extent to which these have been achieved.

Student Outcomes

Students with gifts and talents will benefit from participation in gifted education because:

- 1. more students are identified as potentially gifted and talented**
- 2. a wider range of gifts and talents are recognised and valued**
- 3. students have access to more options inclusive of their learning styles and pace of learning;**
- 4. students have increased control over and responsibility for their learning.**

It must be noted that when the terms “gifts” , “talents” and “potentially gifted” are used in the discussion which follows, this is only because they are terms used in the Outcome statements. However, throughout the Report to this point, I have avoided using the term “potentially gifted” and phrases such as “gifts and talents” because these are terms which require analysis in the final section of the report..

In the previous section, I noted the following:

- each Focus School has in place extensive procedures for identifying gifted students ,
- these procedures involve the participation of staff,
- staff have received extensive professional development on giftedness and its identification,
- schools have in place a wide range of programs for gifted students.

Having visited a range of classrooms in each school and having seen the number of students identified as gifted in those classes, it was evident that in each Focus School the gifted programs have been offered to what I would consider to be appropriate number of gifted students. In no school was there evidence of unreasonably large numbers of children being identified as gifted nor was there evidence of very restricted numbers of gifted students. Since most experts in gifted education refer to the gifted as being found in no more than the top 10% of the population, then the procedures used in the Focus Schools would seem to be identifying gifted children in numbers within that range though with allowance having to be made for schools such as Robertson and Eagle Junction where a larger number of gifted students could be expected. One reason for this expectation is that both schools draw on a population in which the majority of parents place a high priority on education since they either are professional people and/or have themselves a high level of education or they are parents who are determined to ensure their children have the educational opportunities which they did not have.

There is a second reason which is that both schools have enrolled gifted students whose parents have chosen these schools because they are recognised for their provisions for gifted children.

It is reasonable then to conclude that because of the detailed and systematic procedures used for identifying gifted children, more gifted children are being identified in the Focus Schools than would be the case if procedures were less well considered, less extensive and less systematically utilised. Because of the identification procedures used, the schools are identifying both overall functioning and specific talents.

The provisions being made for these students in the Focus Schools include the following:

- differentiated curriculum,
- learning activities using various approaches to thinking such as de Bono, Bloom’s Taxonomy, Williams Taxonomy and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences,

- acceleration,
- curriculum compacting,
- ability clusters within a mixed ability class,
- ability clusters for specific subjects,
- ability cluster in the form of a whole full time class,
- Individual Educational Profiles,
- High School Extension programs,
- Dual enrolment - Secondary and University,
- TOM,
- Days of Excellence,
- Thinkfest,
- “Under 8’s Week” for gifted students,
- Excellence Expo,
- enrichment activities with visiting experts such as Writers and Artists Camps, dance, drama and physical theatre workshops,
- individual projects,
- NavEd program,
- Power Point presentation,
- Maths/Science High Fliers program,
- accelerated Maths and extension units,
- Engineering link program,
- participation for talented basketball players in Tropics, the McDonalds North Queensland Basketball Academy,
- electives provided in Yr 8 and 9 SOSE and Yr 10 Science,
- Art, Sport and Music Schools of Excellence,
- Science Olympiad for Year 7 students,
- Enrichment Discussion Group,
- withdrawal programs for poetry writing,
- Junior Performance Excellence Program for talented primary students from feeder schools,
- Involvement in musical production, Drama Festival, Talent Quest, vocal workshops,
- production of Student Newspaper,
- Excellence program in volleyball and touch football,
- Performance Excellence Program in the Performing Arts,
- Minds Alive - Thinking Skills and problem solving,
- Minds Alive - Science Alive!

This extensive list indicates that both gifted students and talented students are being offered a wide range of provisions which are inclusive of their learning styles, their pace of learning and their particular strengths and interests. This range of activities also provides students with opportunities for choice and to take greater responsibility for their learning. This is at its most evident in the secondary Focus Schools but it is not restricted to secondary and the primary programs are provided a basis for the development of these important aspects of learning.

Conclusion

The enthusiasm, the active engagement in activities and the high motivational levels of students as observed and as reflected in my discussions with them are positive signs of the extent to which the Student Outcomes have been achieved

4.4 Community Outcomes

This section considers the School Outcomes set down for the Focus Schools and the extent to which these have been achieved.

Community Outcomes

There will be broad recognition of, and willingness to support a range of ability-related educational needs of students because:

- 1. parents and community have increased awareness and knowledge of gifted education and the needs of potentially gifted students;**
- 2. parents and community are involved in identifying and providing for a variety of manifestations of gifts and talents in students, e.g. through mentoring**
- 3. parents and community are aware of the Focus School program**

This has largely been addressed in the discussion of School Outcome 4. That discussion detailed ways in which parents were informed of the Focus School programs and assisted in their development. The information sessions provided for them together with the opportunities to participate in school and Outreach workshops encouraged parents to increase their knowledge of giftedness and the special needs which it creates.

All Focus Schools use information from parents including checklists as part of their identification procedures. This is, of course, a necessary component of sound identification because despite beliefs that parents “always think their child is gifted”, this is not so and those who work in the field of gifted education learn from experience that parental judgments are generally accurate. Indeed rather than over-identifying, parents tend to be more cautious and usually hesitate to apply the term, “gifted” to their child and instead will refer to them as “bright”.

All schools actively promote the Focus Schools and the importance of gifted education. Files of newspaper clippings kept by the Enrichment Coordinators were available for perusal and in some cases, sample clippings were provided in the file of material given to me. Enrichment Coordinators and Principals utilised the media well to give publicity to outstanding achievements by individual students and by groups of students such as teams in TOM, performance areas, and various sporting fields. The achievements recognised present a very balanced view of what is regarded as being of importance in education and are used to reinforce a view of the Focus Schools as Centres for Excellence in which gifted students and talented students are well provided for.

It must also be noted that while the publicity given to the Focus Schools is ensuring that the community is well aware of the Focus Schools and their work, this is in the context of the achievements of Education Queensland. In these ways, there is a promotion of State education as offering quality education and this is a matter to be discussed further in the final section of the report.

Further indications of the ways in which the Focus Schools has been the encouragement of parental/community involvement in local branches of the QAGTC where they existed or the efforts of Enrichment Coordinators to encourage such branches where they were not established. Also, seminars especially those involving visiting specialists have been promoted to the community so that parents of students other than those attending the Focus Schools have had the opportunity to attend.

Conclusion

An important feature of the work of the Focus Schools has been the conscious efforts to inform and involve parents and the wider community in the task of providing for gifted students. This has provided Focus Schools with a very strong level of parent and community support and this indicates that Community Outcomes have been achieved.

Note

In every Focus School, Enrichment Coordinators have files filled with letters from principals, teachers and parents expressing their strong support for the particular Focus Schools program and their gratitude for the assistance/support they have received. There are also feedback sheets on

workshops/seminars/presentations as well as records of the huge volume of phone calls from parents at the school, parents seeking advice about the school, teachers and media representatives.

The volume of material was simply too large for me to process in the time provided for this review. However the message is a consistent one: the Focus Schools have proved to be a most important and a most successful advance in providing for gifted students

5. Evaluation of the Focus School Component of the GATE Initiative

5.1 As previously discussed, I have assumed that the outcomes as stated in the document headed, "Gifted and Talented Project" bearing a document date of 1998, are Outcomes determined for the Focus Schools as a component or a concept within the total GATE Initiative. These Outcomes are:

- More teachers are trained in gifted education
- More teachers are actively seeking gifts and talents in their children and are skilled in meeting the needs of students with gifts and talents.
- More school administrators are organising to facilitate flexible progression according to student ability and rate of learning.
- More students are identified as potentially gifted.
- More gifted and talented students are provided with appropriate curriculum services.

Once again there is a very serious problem with these outcomes because each statement begins with "more" - more teachers, more school administrators, more students and more gifted and talented children. Just as I noted when discussing School Outcome 1 which refers to the staff of Focus Schools having "increased awareness and knowledge about gifted education", the use of the term "more" in an Outcome statement creates problems for any evaluation of that Outcome. An evaluation of the Outcome statement, "More teachers are trained in gifted education", would require data showing the number of teachers without training in gifted education prior to the commencement of a Focus School and then data showing the number of teachers trained in gifted education at a time after the Focus School's establishment. However there are major difficulties with this:

- How many teachers trained in gifted education since the establishment of Focus Schools would satisfy the term, "more teachers"? The adjective "more" is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "existing in greater or additional quantity, amount, or degree but this can be satisfied by any number which is one greater than the initial number. I only make this point to show that references to more teachers, more students etc do not provide an adequate basis for evaluating whether the outcomes have been reached. It is not the responsibility of the evaluator to place some numerical value on the term "more" in order to determine then whether the outcomes have been achieved.
- Does the term, "teachers" refer to teachers in some definable geographical region which might be created by putting together the geographical areas served by each Focus School and identifying all the teachers in that created region?
- Having identified the pool of teachers to which the Outcome statement might be referring, then pretest data would have to be gathered. This might seem a relatively simple task of finding out which teachers had already had training in gifted education but what actually constitutes "training"? Does attendance at a workshop on gifted education qualify as "training"? Does training require a certain length of time being devoted to it? Does the nature of the experiences in that time frame have to meet certain criteria and if so what would those criteria be?

To illustrate this problem, some teachers in the Focus School have completed the Certificate of Education offered by the University of N.S.W. This has required formal study and even vacation schools and is studied over a period of approximately two years. There are other teachers who have completed or are completing a Master's Degree in Gifted Education. Against these two examples, how do professional development workshops/seminars compare? This is not to devalue the importance of the professional development programs but my intent is to show that while a term such as "training" is easy to write into an Outcome statement, determinations as to its achievement or otherwise are difficult.

The same problems exist with the gathering of data to show what teachers had "training" during the period under consideration.

- A third problem is to determine to what period of time is the "more" referring. Because the Focus Schools have been established in two phases, then there are different time periods. While that may not seem to be a major difficulty, it is important to note that in the original planning, the second phase schools were not expected to develop Outreach programs in the first stage of their development. Despite this, these schools have developed Outreach programs though the extent to

which these programs have been developed varies. While these matters may seem insignificant, they are not when combined with the issues identified above and when an evaluation is undertaken which might be expected to involve the analysis of hard data.

I have only discussed the first outcome but the same comments apply to each of the Outcome statements because of the use of the term “more”. Of course data could have been gathered, provided there had been a careful and detailed analysis of the Outcome statements and their intent. Following this, the procedures for determining whether or not these Outcomes had been achieved needed to be planned and then implemented. This raises the next question: was the evaluation of the Focus School project as a major part of the GATE Initiative the responsibility of the individual Focus Schools themselves or should this have been the responsibility of Central Office because it was an initiative of Central Office. Of course, the data for each Focus School would have to have been gathered by the schools but according to criteria and using procedures set down for them. This would have been necessary in order to have the data in a form that enabled it to be collated in order to provide an overall picture of the initiative as a whole.

In considering the issues above, I have come to the conclusion that since the outcomes were for the Focus Schools as a group as part of the GATE initiative, the responsibility for evaluating that project on the basis of data gathered from the Focus Schools does not lie with the Schools themselves. The leadership for this should have come from Central Office and this view is supported by statements in the document, “Focus Schools: Implementation Guide, 1997-1999”. Under the heading, Project Officer, there are two pertinent statements of responsibilities:

- ◆ coordinate the collection and analysis of data and presentation of outcomes to relevant stakeholders;
- ◆ coordinate the evaluation of Focus Schools’ programs and staff development.

There are important lessons to be learned from this:

- 1. Outcome statements should be written in ways which enable their achievement or otherwise to be evaluated.**
- 2. Procedures to be used for the purpose of evaluating outcomes should be determined prior to the commencement of the project to which the outcomes refer**
- 3. The participants in a project should know and understand the outcomes and the procedures to be used in evaluating those outcomes. Where necessary, the participants should be given training in any aspects of those procedures**

- 5.2 There is one further problem which I find with the Outcomes from the point of view of someone who is attempting to determine how well these Outcome have been achieved. Four of the five Outcomes are not discrete statements since three Outcomes are necessarily consequences of the first. If more teachers are trained in gifted education, then it would be logical to assume that more teachers are actively seeking gifts and talents in their children and are skilled in meeting the needs of students with gifts and talents. If this is true, then it must be that more students are being identified as gifted. Since the teachers are skilled in meeting the needs of students with gifts and talents, then it would follow that more gifted and talented students are being provided with appropriate curriculum services.

I have noted a series of problems with the Outcome statements. To attempt to adhere to determining whether or not each outcome has been met does not seem a useful exercise. The review would be better serve by asking the one question which must surely be at the heart of why this review has been commissioned. That question is:

What has the Focus School concept achieved in the period since the first Focus Schools were established?

- 5.3 Focus Schools have proved to be the most successful initiative in gifted education that our State system has ever taken.

Their achievements as a “model school” for gifted education are as follows:

- i. At each school, gifted education is an important part of the life and work of the school. It is not an added-on as is the case in most schools where some form of gifted education is provided. The “Whole School” approach is a major achievement and provides a model for other schools.

- ii. Each school is provided a range of provisions including:
 - a) ability clustering within regular classes, within specific subject areas and as full-time classes for gifted children,
 - b) acceleration,
 - c) curriculum compacting,
 - d) differentiated curriculum,
 - e) extension activities outside the curriculum such as TOM, Thinkfest, extension in talent areas.
- iii. Each school is using various approaches to thinking as a framework for planning a differentiated curriculum which is offering challenge to all students but at the levels appropriate to their abilities.. This emphasis on thinking permeates the schools and is a source of staff revitalisation.
- iv. The Focus Schools have made organisational changes in response to the needs of gifted education. Groupings of students are more flexible to accommodate the various types of provisions. In some schools, flexibility in the timetable has also assisted the provisions for the gifted.
- v. All staff have had extensive professional development in gifted education and as a consequence, the majority are supportive and are actively developing the thinking skills focus to their teaching-learning program. They are also co-operating in the identification of gifted students in their classrooms.
- vi. Attention given to the gifted has not been at the expense of other students and indeed the schools have promoted a much greater sense of the worth of each individual that is quite contrary to the view that providing for the gifted is elitist. The schools have achieved a climate in which there is **acceptance of difference** and where students accept that **“it is all right to be smart”**. Such a climate is created when students are valued as individuals and when the achievements of all students are acknowledged and rewarded in whatever field the achievement might occur and irrespective of how great or small that achievement might be.

- vii. Gifted students are being identified using a mix of procedures which draw on:
 - information from teachers, parents, other students, and the gifted students themselves,
 - performance data including some use of objective data from intelligence tests and standardised tests in key subject areas.
- viii. While the “bubble-up” method is providing a useful framework for identification, variations to this are in use. Evolving modification and refinement of the identification procedures are regarded in the Focus Schools as necessary part of gifted education. The experiences gained in the Focus Schools in identification within a whole school approach have much to offer the wider educational system.
- ix. The Focus Schools are exciting schools with a marked vitality. Students seem proud of their schools, are enjoying the range of learning experiences offered to them and for the gifted students, the school has become a place in which they are challenged, are able to spend part of their time at least with other gifted students and are eager to come to school. Teachers, for the most part, seem enthusiastic about what they are doing, are receptive to new ideas and are developing a greater understanding of the “whys” of teaching rather than just the “hows” and the “whats”. The major factor in this would be the emphasis on thinking because such an emphasis asks us as teachers to understand the thinking which our teaching is developing and to see that the content of our teaching is only the vehicle for developing thinking.
- x. Parents are very much part of the gifted education being provided by the Focus Schools. Information sessions have helped parents to understand giftedness and its special needs better. The involvement of parents as partners in education is encouraged through participation in professional development workshops especially those involving visiting specialists, attendance at conferences, extension activities such as TOM (Tournament of Minds), Days of Excellence, Thinkfest, and other activities including classroom assistance, mentoring, website development. The willingness of parents to work with staff is a result of their relief that something is being done for their gifted children as was expressed to me many times by parents. Even when they have criticisms, these are present as part of the interaction between partners seeking to improve educational services. This is in contrast to the often difficult relationship between a school and the parents of a gifted child who is neither identified nor provided for.

The Focus Schools are providing a very important model for other schools and this is a significant achievement. However, their contribution to education extends beyond their internal achievements. Their achievements in Outreach to other schools is as follows:

- I. The Enrichment Coordinators in the Focus Schools have provided a most extensive range of Outreach to schools in their area and beyond. Full details are set down in the section of this review dealing with my visits to the Focus Schools. However that information shows that the range of Outreach provided by the Enrichment Coordinators covers the following:
 - workshops conducted at the Focus School by the Enrichment Coordinator and/or by visiting specialists;
 - workshops conducted by the Enrichment Coordinator and/or visiting specialists at Outreach schools either for the staff of that school or for teachers from that school and other schools;
 - mentoring activities with individual or small numbers of staff in particular schools developing or wishing to develop gifted programs;
 - lesson modelling by Enrichment Coordinator for teachers at own school, or for visiting teachers or at Outreach schools;
 - telephone/email/fax communications to advise on specific needs/problems/issues experienced by individual teachers in Outreach schools;
 - provisions of newsletters/information updates to schools within the region of the school or to other schools seeking information from other parts of Queensland.
- ii) The Outreach provided by the Enrichment Coordinators in 2000 involved:
 - approximately 235 “School participations”, and
 - approximately 1200 “Teacher participations”.

I have used the term “School Participation” because some schools “participated” at more than one Outreach activity. Where schools have participated more than once, this will for some activities involve different staff and for other activities such as mentoring, this may involve one or more staff being guided in terms of unit planning, identification, and other aspects of gifted education. All activities are a demand on the time of the Enrichment Coordinator especially when it requires travel to a school which might be nearby or over an hour’s drive. To give a sense of the extent of Outreach to schools, “School Participation” has been used rather than take into account only the names of schools without any recognition of the times in which staff from a school have been involved in Outreach.

Similarly, I have chosen to use the term, “Teacher Participation” to allow for multiple participation by some teachers.

The evidence is strong that, through the extensive Outreach programs organised and largely conducted by the Enrichment Coordinators, the Focus many teachers in Yr 2000 received some professional development in gifted education. The follow-up to the professional development workshops by numbers of schools and the planning which is taking place in those schools in terms of gifted education indicate that the Outreach program has assisted some teachers to reach the stage of identifying gifted students and making some provisions for them.

For most Outreach schools, their working in moving to the providing gifted education is only in the early developmental stage. After all, the first task of the Focus Schools has been to provide what could be regarded as models for gifted education. As noted previously, that task required staff to acquire considerable knowledge and understanding of giftedness and how best it might be provided for. Only in that way could attitudes change so that staff supported the gifted programs. Again, as noted previously, changes in attitude do not take place overnight but usually only through an ongoing exposure to information designed to dispel the many myths that surround giftedness.

In the Focus Schools, such changes were possible because of the strength and commitment of the Principal and at least some other senior staff and above all, the Enrichment Coordinator who was always there to guide, to encourage and at times to debate! However, Outreach schools do not have that important team to make gifted education “happen” more easily. The schools have to endeavour to build the team of staff who will have most to do with implementing a gifted program but those staff need more professional development than has been available to all the staff. It takes time for these staff to strengthen their knowledge and understanding to the point where they can confidently work with the majority of the staff especially in terms of promoting attitude change.

Many of the Outreach schools experience considerable difficulty in maintaining any type of program development let alone gifted education and this is because of the greater staff turn-over in the non-metropolitan areas. As was explained to me in an interview at Denison just as a particular aspect of a thinking approach was in place and being used enthusiastically by staff, there was a large turn-over of staff and the work had to begin again!

The points are made to emphasise the fact that although the Focus Schools have been the major source for professional development in gifted education in their surrounding area, the spread of actual programs in gifted education is necessarily slow. Nonetheless, it is happening but it will require ongoing support for some time yet and at the moment the key to that support is the Enrichment Coordinator.

5.4 In the 1998 document, “Gifted and Talented Project”, there is the only statement of Outputs for the Focus School initiative,

- Refinement of curriculum model for gifted education
- Refinement of identification model for students with gifts and talents
- Professional development provided to school personnel
- Outreach programs from phase one Focus Schools
- Report on measuring progress in whole-school GATE planning and implementation; and student outcomes.

The outputs referring to professional development and Outreach programs have already been covered by the previous discussions. Brief comments will be made about the first two statements.

By “curriculum model”, I must presume the reference is to the document, “A Model of Curriculum Provision for Gifted Education and Talent Development”. This is based on the material produced as part of the Zigzag and the Unicorn Projects. As I believe was expected of them, this model has been used by the Enrichment Coordinators but from my discussions with them, all have made some modifications to this model in the light of their experiences and in response to their particular school environment. This must be regarded as normal practice for quality teachers, which the Enrichment Coordinators are.

However, the Model needs to be reviewed to ensure that schools are provided with a model which is clearly expressed and which provided them with a framework for the development of gifted education. It may well be that the Model as used by the Focus Schools is a very useful one for other schools where the expertise is considerably less than is found in the Focus Schools. This must be examined critically to determine whether an improved model or even a different model might be necessary. However whatever the model, it must be described in ways which will be accessible to non-expert readers and I believe the present document lacks clarity even for those with expertise.

The output statement refers to “identification model” and this must be assumed to be the “bubble-up” method outlined in the “Model for Curriculum Provisions” document. Again, in the Focus Schools, there have been modifications to this approach to identification as I have previously noted. Since the Curriculum Model as presented is based on the “bubble-up” method of identification, then a revisiting of the Model will necessarily involve a consideration of identification procedures in order to determine whether or not it should be revised or replaced.

As will be discussed in the final section of this report, I believe that the Enrichment Coordinators are the ones best able to carry out such a review and revision.

5.5 The last output statement is a very important one:

- Report on measuring progress in whole-school GATE planning and implementation; and student outcomes.

It is only in the document, "Focus Schools: Implementation Guide, 1997-1999" that any information is provided which related to this Output statement although the document does not contain any statement on Outputs. I have previously cited the two statements of responsibilities of the Project Officer. A third statement is set down under the responsibilities of the Enrichment Coordinators: "*document program outcomes and assist evaluation procedures including data collection*".

Now while Enrichment Coordinators have documented much of their work and gathered data in various forms, no coordinated approach has been taken with this. No format for documenting outcomes would appear to have been discussed with the coordinators or provided to them in printed form. Unfortunately the Implementation Guide devotes the final page to "Evaluation". The first section of this page suggests the use of Gagné and Nadeau's "Survey of Teacher Opinions about the Gifted and their Education" and suggests:

In addition, data gathering indicative of improved student learning outcomes could include surveys of teachers, parents and students indicating, among other dimensions stated on page 4 above, levels of satisfaction with being implemented. (Implementation Guide, 1999)

An examination of page 4 of the documents shows that the dimensions appear to be either the Outcomes stated under the headings Student Outcomes, School Outcomes, Community Outcomes or the dot points under a statement which indicates characteristics of the flexible learning environment which the document suggests gifted students need.

However the major problems are to be found with the next and most important section which is headed, **Assessment of Change in Student Performance** and begins with the following: "*Several strategies will be explored for measuring changes in student learning outcomes.*". The strategies suggested are:

- ◆ Benchmarking
- ◆ External Control Comparisons
- ◆ Evaluation Instruments.

For each strategy, several suggestions are set down. Each strategy is complex and demanding and requires proper training in such evaluation techniques. This can be illustrated as follows:

Benchmarking

The first step suggested is the defining of learning outcomes in terms of the Focus School's program. These are to be defined in behavioural terms which is a necessary step but not an easy one unless people are trained in defining outcomes in behavioural terms which lend themselves to measurement. With this done, the next step was to itemise "*criteria indicative of improvement that can be linked to changes in classroom practice resulting from program intervention*". Finally, teachers are to be asked "*to make judgments (at two or three intervals) on four levels of descriptions for each criteria*" or they are to be asked "*to make judgments about differences observed such as 'To what extent has (student) demonstrated application of higher order thinking skills to problems solving activities'*".

Now while the procedures are sound, it is the difficulty of the various steps together with the amount of time which would need to be devoted to each step which is the issue. Such tasks require a level of expertise which can only be gained through systematic training. Even then, support would need to be given in the planning of each step.

For benchmarking to have been used, training was necessary with an emphasis on workshops in which the Enrichment Coordinators as a team could have developed a benchmarking program which would have had sufficient commonality to enable a data to be compiled for project evaluation.

External Control Comparisons

This strategy suggests the use of comparisons of performances on Statewide tests using "like" students or "like" schools. The data used for comparisons would be "trend data" which "will yield traces of differences in learning outcomes".

Now here we are encountering a problem which is one of the most difficult in education, not just in gifted education. I refer to the problem of attempting to use research designs in common usage in empirical studies in the sciences when endeavouring to determine the worth or otherwise of some educational practice. To put this into the context of gifted education, the discussion of Evaluation clearly is concerned with the question of whether or not the particular program has had any effect on student learning. The following are some of the issues involved:

- ◆ In scientific method, the most common research method is to establish two groups, a control group who is not given the “treatment/chemical/or whatever else is under investigation” and an experimental group which is given the treatment. Of course, for valid comparisons the two groups have to be as close to identical as possible in order to explain any changes in the experimental group as being the result of the treatment. This requires then a matching of the two groups on as many variable as are determined as of significance for the experiment.

Once the experiment involves people, the task of matching the two groups becomes much more complex because of the variables which could affect the outcomes. Even so, with experiments involving medication for example, there are variable which the experimenter can eliminate as ones not likely to impact on the results.

The problem with education is that it is almost impossible to identify all or even most of the variables which will impact on whether some learning has taken place. We are dealing with variables which relate to psychological, physical, family, peer group, socio-economic dimensions of human behaviour to name the most important, All of these variables are only labels for a large number of complex factors and while this makes for problems, we need to understand that it is not just these factors on their own which must be considered but also the way these factors cluster and interact.

- ◆ To this complexity in education, we must always remember that while the students may be “matched” on personal variables, they are members of a class and each class has its own dynamics which affect learning outcomes. Adding to this is the factor of the teacher so that even if by some incredible stroke of good fortune, we were able to match the two groups of “like” students on a set of critically important variables, the teachers then have to be matched in terms of their personal attributes and teaching skills as well as specific psychological factors such as their perceptions of particular students and the unconscious or conscious expectations they hold for each student and the extent to which those perceptions and expectations are communicated to the students.

Even if we were able to set up two groups of “like” students, the complexity of variables create major difficulties if we wish to demonstrate educational gains in terms of student learning. Of course if the two groups of students are in different schools, we have added another level of complexity.

- ◆ Similarly, matching “like” schools is fraught with major problems since schools are not buildings but are organisations of people - administrators, administrative staff, teachers, students, parents and the community the school serves. Even if we could match the variables associated with each of those elements of a school, comparisons of data on State-wide tests are still comparisons of student performance at a given time and this brings into consideration all of the factors discussed in the previous dot-point.
- ◆ If the data from State-wide tests were to be used for comparison purposes, what really would such data show? The data would show that students in a particular year in a particular school performed worse than, the same as, or better than students in a different school. While this might be of some passing interest, it tells us nothing about the effectiveness of a particular Focus School’s program. To illustrate, if the results in a state-wide test for students at Robertson State School were to be compared with the results of students at Nambour State School, what would such a comparison show? The answer to that is that it would probably show that one school (Robertson) performed better than the other (Nambour). Such a result could be predicted because the two schools are very different in terms of their student population and the communities from which the students come. Therefore if there were differences in the data to show a better performance for Robertson students, it would be simplistic to explain this in terms of the Focus School program because it is not possible to isolate and eliminate the effects of other variables.

State-wide test data will be affected by other factors such as the “quality” of a particular cohort at the time of testing. Comparisons of the performance of one year cohort in a particular school with the performance of a cohort from the preceding year but in the same school are comparisons of different populations without any account being taking of the overall ability of the two groups, the distribution of abilities within each cohort, teachers, the curriculum - and this is not a conclusive list. Even if the

performances for gifted students within each cohort were identified and grouped, we then have to consider differences in the number of gifted students in the cohorts and the quality and the size of the majority of the cohorts. The complexity of such analyses of data requires expertise at a very high level. It is not a task which can be undertaken by untrained teachers.

- ◆ In empirical research, it is possible to set up an experiment in which a chemical, for example, is administered to a group for a set period and then the chemical is withdrawn and the condition of the subjects prior to the administration of the chemical has been determined, then the conditioned after the chemical has been administered for a certain period of time, and then after a period of time when the chemical has no longer been administered. In education, there are many reasons including ethical ones where we cannot use such a method. We cannot take a group of gifted students and measure them on their state of learning prior to the commencement of the Focus School program, measure them after a period of time when they have received a “gifted education” and then remove the gifted program and measure them after a period of time without any gifted program.

Evaluation Instruments

To illustrate the difficulty of this evaluation strategy, it is enough to state the first task:

Developing instruments, where necessary, to allow the above assessment, research and evaluation processes to take place.

Such a task is time-consuming and requires specialist expertise to provide some training to the Enrichment Coordinators and ongoing support.

The problem with all of the above is that the Implementation Guide is providing information on tasks which are beyond the expertise of untrained teachers. What are being called for are research procedures and research expertise more appropriate to a doctoral study than to the action research of the classroom.

It is important to note that for decades the research into the various provisions for the gifted produced few studies showing academic gains for gifted students in such provisions. The provision which most suffered from these research attempts was full-time classes for gifted students. When the academic performances of “control” groups were compared with the academic performances of students in full-time classes for gifted students, little if any gains were found in most studies. This led to the conclusion held by many researchers that gifted students in special classes did not achieve academically at levels significantly higher than did gifted students in regular classrooms.

It has only been in recent years that meta-studies of such research over a very long period of time has revealed that while the evidence for academic gains was not strong, there was other evidence of great significance. This evidence related to how gifted students rated their experiences in full time classes for gifted children and overwhelmingly the students rated the experience highly. Interestingly, how those students regarded the experience was echoed by students in my discussions with them in the Focus Schools.

It is possible to determine whether a particular educational practice or provision has had positive effects on the students participating but it is a difficult exercise which requires a high level of expertise in research procedures. Simple comparisons are rarely valid and usually are misleading. To move beyond these requires:

- ◆ training in how to ask the “right” questions, that is, questions which are meaningful and which lend themselves to valid research procedures;
- ◆ training in evaluation/research procedures;
- ◆ careful planning prior to the provisions being put in place;
- ◆ gathering of pre-provision data on student learning;
- ◆ gather of student learning data after a set period of time;
- ◆ training in data analysis.

These requirements were not met with the Focus School Initiative and given this, data on student learning cannot be expected at this stage to show that student learning has been improved by the Focus School programs.

6. The Focus Schools - Issues and Lessons

The Focus School Initiative has proved to be a most effective initiative in gifted education in Queensland. What has made it so different and so much more effective than previous initiatives is that this has been directed at whole school changes so that gifted students are more systematically being identified and a greater range of provisions are made for their educational needs. Curriculum differentiation characterises the school and not just isolated classrooms while thinking ability frameworks have been utilised for curriculum planning and for teaching-learning strategies. As the Focus Schools have progressed in their own development, they have been able to provide professional development, gifted education modelling and mentoring to increasing numbers of other schools.

Despite the problems I have discussed in terms of Outcomes and Outputs, the review process has shown that the Focus Schools as identities have met the various outcomes set down for them while the Focus School Initiative as a whole has met Outcomes and Outputs for which they have been given the appropriate training.

Yet out of this development and growing expertise come a number of issues from which much can be learned. These are issues which I have identified in the course of this review and many of these reflects concerns expressed to me by Principals and Enrichment Coordinators. The experience of the Focus Schools provides lessons which should be considered carefully for the new initiative of the various Learning and Development Centres and indeed for future initiatives of Education Queensland. Since these are matters which offer some directions for gifted education in Queensland, the discussion in this section will be limited.

Unrealistic Time Framework for Initiative

It takes considerable time to develop into a Focus School because:

- ◆ teacher attitudes must be supportive of gifted education and for many this requires changes in attitudes. Such changes arise from teachers gaining better knowledge, understanding and acceptance of gifted students and their educational needs;
- ◆ it requires a shift from a content focus to one which focuses on the thinking abilities which need to be developed in students;
- ◆ a further shift is required to provide effectively for the gifted within the new framework;
- ◆ further time is required for the new structures or frameworks for planning to become embedded as part of the whole school;
- ◆ staff changes affect the flow of development of the school as a whole;
- ◆ the inservicing of Focus School staff is an ongoing process even more so when the school has a pattern of large turn-over of staff.

Determination of Success

Evidence of success in education is a long-term process and as I have previously discussed, the evaluation of an initiative such as the Focus Schools is a complex process which requires:

- ◆ participants in the initiative to know its implementation that evaluation would be carried out and that they would have responsibilities in the conduct of the evaluation;
- ◆ any statements of Outcomes and Outputs to be clear, precise and capable of being evaluated;
- ◆ the staff charged with the responsibility for implementing the initiative in a school to:
 - a) know and understand what the Outcomes and Outputs are;
 - b) know and understand the procedures to be used in evaluating the achievement of the Outcomes and Outputs;
 - c) be trained in the procedures involved in the evaluation of the initiative.

Training and Coordination and Networks

That the Focus Schools have achieved so much is because of the quality of the Enrichment Coordinators and the support they have received from senior staff especially their Principals. However, they needed a training program which ensured some commonality of thinking about key issues in gifted education as well as covering the following:

- ◆ the evaluation of the initiative;
- ◆ developing training packages to train others;
- ◆ action research including a consideration of ethical issues in educational research
- ◆ conducting seminars with “difficult” audiences;

- ◆ negotiation skills;
- ◆ ways of offering outreach programs.

However, the Enrichment Coordinators need their ongoing training process but whereas the training they are providing the next level down of trainers in Outreach schools is emphasising the “how-to” of the classroom, the Enrichment Coordinators need further training in the academic dimensions of gifted education. In their Outreach work, they need to be able to justify practices on the basis of their knowledge of the literature, especially research literature, on gifted education. While the Enrichment Coordinators attend and give presentations at State Conferences, participants at these conferences tend to be more interested in the practices of gifted education rather than the theoretical bases for practice, especially new practices. Conferences which are of a more academic or theoretical nature are the ones which the coordinators should be attending and presenting. Presentations at this level would help to dispel some of the beliefs in the superior quality of education in other states!

As well, Enrichment Coordinators believed that for their further and ongoing development, they needed the opportunity for in-depth discussions with experts in the field of gifted education. It should be noted, however, that while the Enrichment Coordinators saw the need for ongoing training at a more academic level, they also saw the value of the Coordinators maintaining some teaching commitments. This gives them credibility with the field and enables them to continue providing effective modelling in their Inreach and Outreach programs.

There were concerns expressed in the Focus Schools at what they perceived to be a lack of direction at the beginning of the initiative which meant they “floundered” unnecessarily for a time. This was not helped by being encouraged to work separately in order that this might encourage a variety of approaches. Yet a more integrated approach would have enabled the Focus Schools to create a support network. Such a network would have assisted the second phase Focus Schools because it would have facilitated the more rapid development of those schools who would have been able to draw on the experiences of the first phase Focus Schools.

The Focus Schools have now created such a network and this is proving to be a very effective support structure as well as facilitating the new Outreach developments encouraged under the Learning and Development Centre model.

Lessons

While the issues above have been in the context of the Focus Schools, there are lessons which can be learned which would assist in the development of other initiatives. In particular, these are matters which need to have been considered at this early stage of the Learning and Development Centres.

7. Directions: If we handicap the gifted, we handicap the Future!

Introductory Comments

In the second part of this report, I outlined developments in gifted education in Queensland over the past twenty or so years and this outline illustrates why, in the QAGTC Submission to the Senate Enquiry on The Education of Gifted and Talented Children, it states: *“The education of gifted and talented children has progressed slowly however, due to ongoing prejudice and lack of understanding in general. Few schools identify and provide support for gifted children.” (QAGTC, April 2001)* The reality is that most gifted students are not identified and most, irrespective of whether or not they have been identified, receive no defensible program to meet their needs. They remain trapped in a lockstep approach to learning in which every child -with the exception of those with identifiable disabilities - is expected to learn the same content at the same time and in the same time and taught in the same way. This reveals a basic issue in education: we are prepared to identify those with special needs but do not acknowledge the gifted as having special needs. Further in the identification of those special needs students, we use as part of that process, a tool which is frowned on if we are wanting to identify gifted children. I refer, of course, to a test of intellectual functioning. This is one of many examples of the way gifted education is confronted with views and practices which are acceptable when dealing with special education but not with gifted education.

Having identified children with special needs, we accept that there has to be significant differentiation of the curriculum and of teaching strategies in order to meet their needs. On the other hand, for gifted children, who are characterised by the speed of their brain processing and who therefore learn quickly and easily, there is little or no recognition of this distinguishing characteristic. If they complete a task quickly as is usually the case, they are “rewarded” by having to do more of the same, or fault is found with their work, usually its neatness or

the quality of handwriting, and they are made to re-do the work. If neither of those are done, then the gifted child is ignored while the rest of the class continues with completing the task! It is little wonder that the common complaint of gifted students is that they are bored. Their parents expand on this by stating that their gifted children are bored, frustrated, unhappy at school, and don't want to go to school.

(These issues were reflected in my discussions with parents in the Focus Schools when they talked about the differences between their children in the Focus School environment compared with when they were in another school. These are matters which always emerge at conferences on the gifted and in seminars for parent groups. It is a common theme which I constantly encounter in my professional assessment work.)

If it were only a matter of the gifted students being bored, that would be concern enough. Unfortunately the problem is far worse. Bored and frustrated gifted students often resort to coping behaviours such as:

- spending their time endeavouring to produce beautiful and accurate work. While this might be thought a desirable outcome, it is too often a factor in the development of perfectionist tendencies which can lead to a fear of failure and an unwillingness to take risks, both of which have negative effects on school performance.
- divergent thinking which in some circumstances can have a negative effect on school performance and lead to underachievement;
- off-task behaviours which increase in magnitude as the gifted student receives attention, and therefore reinforcement, for these negative behaviours. This pattern of behaviour comes to dominate the teacher's beliefs about the student and tends to characterise the student at least in the school setting. For some students, the original problem of boredom ends in a misdiagnosis of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder).

These introductory comments deal with only some of the problems of neglect and while much more could be written, it does not seem necessary to do so in this report. After all, the evidence for the neglect of the gifted is to be found in the following:

- Focus Schools were established as an important initiative in providing for the gifted:
- the Focus Schools are helping an increasing number of schools who have recognised a need and are now seeking support to do something about gifted students;
- recognition of the problem and the need is reflected in the concern expressed about schools interested in providing for the gifted but who are outside the range of Focus Schools and who are without funding to develop gifted programs;
- this review has been conducted with one aspect of it being to look to the future!

However while a problem and a need are recognised and while there have been at various times initiatives designed to improve the education of the gifted, progress in twenty years has not led to changes in the system as a whole. It is only a small number of schools and individual classrooms where change has taken place and become provisions which have become embedded in the school's program. If as a system, we now wish to make substantial progress in the education of the gifted, it is necessary to identify some of the major barriers to attaining this much desired but seemingly out-of-reach educational goal.

Barriers to Progress

- ◆ A major barrier to change is the attitudes found in many teachers, parents and in society in general. There seems to be something about the concept of giftedness and about gifted children which evokes negative attitudes. By contrast, outstanding performances, which are demonstrated in "acceptable" areas such as the arts but even more in sporting fields, do not evoke the same negative attitudes. We admire the great artist, the great musician, the award-winning actor and we envy - but in the best way! - the outstanding swimmer, tennis player, footballer, golfer - and the list is limited only by the sports themselves. Is it because we are comfortable with the outstanding achievers in those fields because we can always claim that we never had the opportunity to play the piano, train in swimming or athletics just to name a few of the "acceptable" dimensions of human performance? If we never have the opportunity to experience these, then how can we know whether or not we too might have been outstanding/ However with gifted children, adults share the very thing which makes the difference, namely, intellectual functioning. When an adult encounters a gifted child who demonstrates in language, in knowledge and understanding of the world but also who demonstrates a searching for answers to major philosophical questions dealing with the meaning of life, the situation is very different. The adult is confronted with evidence that this child thinks differently and at a high level of intellectual complexity. In such a situation, adults cannot resort to the belief that if only they had been given the opportunity, they, too, could have been just as "smart". So if this interaction with the gifted child makes the adult feel less knowledgeable, less able than the child, then for some adults, this can evoke negative attitudes designed to reduce the child to a level below that of the adult. This is in fact the "cutting down of Tall Poppies" strategy which some would argue characterises our society.

Negative attitudes towards the gifted are products of factors such as a lack of knowledge and a lack of security in one's own self. Lack of knowledge is not always acknowledged and is instead replaced by strongly held beliefs which related to the myths of giftedness and gifted education. Now while negative attitudes and the beliefs based on myths rather than knowledge can have a direct impact on interactions with gifted children in a school setting, there are more subtle ways in which these attitudes influence education. For example, parents seeking acceleration for their gifted child may encounter opposition from principals, from teachers or even from guidance officers. This will be the case if any or all of these staff have negative attitudes and associated negative beliefs about gifted education. Parents may well be told that acceleration is undesirable because "the evidence is (or research shows) that these children often experience major problems in adolescence." Such statements are not based on research but on beliefs. It is reasonable to assume then that the refusal to make available an important provision for some gifted children must be related to negative attitudes directed at the gifted. One must wonder whether that same resistance would be exhibited if the parents of a child with marked learning problems requested program modification for their child such as repeating a particular grade!

The experience in the Focus Schools has shown that little can be achieved unless attitudes change and this change can only be facilitated by building up the knowledge base of the staff on giftedness. Change of attitudes do not occur overnight and the process of this change is a length one which requires time. This has been discussed in previous sections of the Report.

- ◆ There are many organisational barriers to the development of gifted education. Some of these reflect key assumptions as outlined by Watters:

Formal education is structured on the assumption of age related development and intellectual homogeneity. It assumes that children's intellectual, emotional and social

development depend on age. In such it denies the real existence of difference in intellectual, social and emotional development of children of similar chronological age. Effective, just and equitable education is hamstrung because we fail to recognise the heterogeneity of intellectual, emotional and social development within single age classrooms. (Watters, 2001)

The following is a list of critical points at which organisational barriers emerge either in reality or in perceptions..

- **Early entry.** For many years, early entry into formal schooling was almost impossible to obtain. In most cases, requests for early entry would progress to the final step of a letter to the Minister. Since the position of senior officers in the Department of Education was one of adherence to what was considered to be the policy, their advice to Ministers would not support early entry. In almost all cases, the Minister would act according to this advice. It was not until recent years that it was realised that early entry was possible if it could be demonstrated that the child would be disadvantaged by early entry was refused. Although this provision for early entry still exists, few children have been granted early entry and this is understandable when the procedures for gaining early entry are considered. It would seem that these have been written not to allow early entry but to make it extremely difficult ever to gain the approval. The resistance to early entry is a source of considerable frustration to parents whose child is clearly functioning at a very high level. For many of these parents, the solution has been to find an independent school whose entry policies were more flexible.
- **Acceleration.** This is one of the two provisions for gifted students overwhelmingly supported by research. (*Ability grouping is the other.*) Unfortunately this is one of the provisions where opposition to it is often based on beliefs without any demonstrated knowledge of major research findings. Unfortunately inflexibility in the progression of students through the grades is a characteristic of the system as it operates rather than the flexibility necessary for curriculum differentiation which is the very important position taken in the “2010” document.
- **Ability clustering.** Despite the overwhelming research evidence which supports ability groupings in some form or other for gifted students, discussions as to the possible use of such a provision have for many years now been without result. The most common reason put forward for not establishing cluster groupings is that it is said to be against Departmental Policy. Other reasons relate to beliefs such as:
 - ability groupings for gifted children lead to the development of elitist attitudes/behaviours in the gifted students;
 - they strip the class of gifted children who provide a model for the rest, and
 - they do not provide for the need for gifted children to work with children of lesser ability so that they will develop understanding and tolerance of the less abled.

These are beliefs statements not supported by research evidence.

- **Ability Range.** Since the introduction of mainstreaming, teachers are having to cope with a wide range of levels of intellectual functioning. Students who were once identified as being “mildly mentally handicapped” and often placed in Special Schools with small numbers in each class and with specially trained teachers, are now placed in mainstream classrooms. In such a classroom, the teacher, untrained in Special Education, may well be trying to provide for one or two gifted children, one or two children with significant weaknesses in their intellectual functioning, with a child with a physical disability, and several children with behavioural disorders.

It is little wonder that in these settings, the teacher is grateful for the presence of the gifted children because they don't need attention and can be largely ignored!

- **Key Interface Points** Accelerated learning in some form or other will be part of a differentiated curriculum for gifted students. This is a product of their speed of learning and their insatiable thirst for learning and knowledge. Difficulties can occur when primary schools endeavour to arrange some form of accelerated learning into certain subject areas in the secondary school's program. Since this should only involve exceptionally advanced gifted students, such an arrangement should be welcomed by the secondary school whereas what is more likely to happen is the inflexibility of the timetable dominates at the expense of the gifted child.

A similar problem can occur in the interface between the Junior secondary years and Senior and again in the interface between Senior and University. This later interface was a matter for concern raised in discussions during the visits to Focus Schools. I was informed that some Universities believed that as much as they would be happy for a Senior student to be studying a university subject, there was a problem with HECS and with administration fees and in some cases Student Union fees.

- ◆ Where there are real organisational barriers which prevent or restrict the education of the gifted, they should be changed if “2010” is to be more than an educational mantra. However, all of these barrier “points” are ones which reveal the negative effect of attitudes, lack of knowledge and understanding and unfortunately, administrative “buck passing”. In large organisation such as a state system of education, it has always been convenient to blame the system and refer the problem to someone else - especially somewhere higher up the chain of responsibility.

The most extraordinary aspect of these “barriers” is that they are designed to restrict and to limit those whose greatest need is to learn! Instead of working hard to find ways to challenge and to extend these students, we find there are those who work extremely hard to impose limitations on them:

- by limiting what they learn;
- by limiting the experiences provided for learning;
- by limiting their responses in both quality and quantity and
- by imposing single models for responding.

In these ways, we have limited their world view which is neither in keeping with “2010” nor with what our society needs for a quality future.

- ◆ There is another barrier to progress and I believe this in the phrase “gifted and talented”. We can hardly expect teachers to become enthusiastic about gifted education when there is a great deal of confusion created by the terms we use. Such confusion does not encourage those who already have little interest in gifted students to become enthusiastic about their education. Unfortunately, when Departmental documents use terms referring to the gifted in a variety of ways, this sends out the wrong message, one which does little to change attitudes.

The problem is with the way we use the terms “gifted” and “talented” and then the different ways the terms are defined. At times, “gifted and talented” is used as if it really means that “gifted” and “talented” are synonymous. At other times we refer to gifted children and talented children and clearly they are meant to be different terms identifying different groups.. The matter is then complicated when reference is made to “gifts” and “talents” with again these apparently being the same at times yet different at others. This confusion of terms is best illustrated by reference to key Departmental documents pertaining to gifted education. The following documents are ones from which the various terms have been drawn:

A Model of Curriculum Provision of Gifted Education and Talent Development - 2000

Unicorn Project, Draft of Report 1996/97

The Education of Gifted Students in Queensland , Curriculum and Studies CS-07, 1998

Gifted and Talented Project, 1998

1998 Report GATE Phase Two

The Focus Schools Report, 1999

Report of the Unicorn Project, December 1999

Focus Schools: Implementation Guide, 1997-1999.

Terms found in these documents are:

to identify and meet the needs of *potentially gifted* students

to develop the *talents of gifted* underachievers

The full range of *identified talents* are catered for

To enhance school curriculum responses to the needs of students, particularly *students with gifts and talents*.

More teachers are actively seeking *gifts and talents*

More students are identified as *potentially gifted*

appropriate provision for *gifted students*

identified *gifted and talented* children

students of all abilities and talents are recognised and valued.

to improve educational outcomes by implementing *gifted education* and **talent development strategies** for *all students with gifts and talents*. Curriculum is based on an optimal view of schooling as a search for *the talents of all*

encouraging staff to adopt processes to identify *students with potential*

I would argue that the ways in which “gifted and talented” have been used both separately and as a phrase is confusing and encourages the view that “Every child is gifted”. This is a statement which has a wonderful reassuring warmth to it but which is using “gifted” in the sense of every child being of worth and every child being able to do something better than anything else the child does. Such a use of “gifted” embraces the child with a limited level of intellectual functioning who can do something which is praiseworthy, which is special compared with the limited other things that child can do. But that is not the psychological sense of “giftedness” which is concerned with the child doing something at a level which is demonstrably superior to the performance of age peers. For the reviewer, what it is that the gifted child can do at a level demonstrably superior to age peers is intellectual functioning or more simply, **thinking**.

The problem of terminology is made worse by the introduction of the term “potentially gifted”. Not only do I have difficulties with such a concept, but also I believe that it can lead to schools continuing to neglect the gifted because they can point to results of academic assessments, subjective or objective, and show how very “average” the performances are and then argue that “clearly the student is not potentially gifted!” Of course we can argue that such a teacher has demonstrated a very limited knowledge of giftedness and while this would be correct, the opportune moment for change to a more informed and positive approach to gifted students may well have been lost.

If the term, “potentially gifted” is used, what does this really mean? Does it mean that “giftedness” only comes into being when the individual demonstrates this by some behaviour or product? What behaviours enables us to identify someone as gifted? Here we must consider the bubble-up method of identification of gifted students where there appears to be a hierarchy of behaviours which enable us to move from “potentially gifted” to “gifted” but are the behaviours supported by empirical data or are they an arbitrary groups of behaviours? Since the Model based on ZigZag and Unicorn provides for four strands with identification taking place at each strand, do these strands reflect a hierarchy in the progress from “potentially gifted” to “gifted”?

If potential giftedness is an appropriate term, then such a view would suggest that there can be no such person as a gifted underachiever since the lack of performance in that student would not indicate giftedness. This would support those who, when presented with the evidence that a child is gifted on the basis of an extremely high performance on an intelligence test, respond by stating, “Well, I see no evidence of this in the student’s school work!”

How are we able to identify “potentially gifted” children? If we use a checklist of behaviours, are these the characteristics of gifted children or are they the characteristics of children who are “potentially gifted”? If the characteristics are ones which identify “potentially gifted” children, then what characteristics do these children display **when they are gifted**?

While the term, “potentially gifted” is derived from the theorising of Gagné² and has meaning for those familiar with his writings, the term is less accessible and meaningful to those not familiar with his

² Gagné’s concept of giftedness is to be found in a number of publications:

Gagné, F (1985), “Giftedness and Talent: reexamining a reexamination of the definitions.” *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 29, 103-112.

discussions of giftedness. Terminology which is not understood without an understanding of the context from which the term has come does not seem to be helpful. It can make even more confusing a problem created by the most important terms in gifted education, namely “gifted” and “talented”.

There is a need for clarification in regard to the terms we want to use because how we use those terms will have a major impact on how we identify gifted students and how we provide for them. This discussion will be discussed further in the next section which deals with possible ways ahead.

Educating the Gifted as Core Business of Education

- ◆ Gifted education has never been recognised as part of the core business of education. It is treated as a fringe activity to be taken on by enthusiasts in their own classrooms and only in the classrooms of any others who are interested. This immediately limits the type of provisions being put in place to enrichment in the homeroom and/or a limited pull-out program. Such fringe activities rarely survive because their existence is largely dependent on the continuing presence of the enthusiasts who established the gifted provisions and on the support of or non-interference by the principal.

The view that the education of the gifted is a fringe activity is reinforced by funding. Periodically over the decades, some funding has been earmarked for gifted education, and when this has happened, there is always a surge of interest and of activity which rarely lasts beyond the lifetime of funding. This is evident in the flurry of activities under the GATE Initiative when part of the \$1 million budget was allocated to districts for funding specific projects in gifted education. It would be interesting to review those projects to determine how effective they were and how long they lasted especially once the district funds were no longer available. One-off funding promotes one-off projects which like footprints in the sands, are soon erased.

Major changes to an educational system cannot be achieved when the system encourages short-term projects without adequate consideration of the role those projects have to play in long term goals. When funding and the explicit and implicit messages of the educational system devalue the importance of the education of gifted students, then gifted education will continue to be on the fringe, an educational option for those who are interested or for those who want to access funds albeit of a short term nature. Statements about the value placed on gifted students and their education must be judged against the actual practices of education and while, gifted education is an option on the fringe, then those statements are mere rhetoric.

- ◆ Why should the education of the gifted be brought in from the fringe and made part of the core business of education?
 - **The Smart State:** Government policy is to promote the vision of Queensland as the Smart State and it is self-evident that a Smart State needs Smart Schools. This is an underlying theme of the “2010” document. Technological initiatives, the New Basics, and Literacy are important components in the development of Smart Schools. Yet how can we have Smart Schools, if we ignore “Smart” students? Of course there are programs for rewarding excellence in various fields and these are commendable. However the work of the Focus Schools has demonstrated that the system must make major changes in order to ensure that Smart Schools are ones where gifted education is accepted as a necessary part of the program and not an option. Smart Schools will be ones where gifted students are challenged to extend their thinking and their achievements and to become confident on their path to self-actualisation.

Failure to create school environments in which the education of the gifted is recognised and well provided for will result in a continuing loss of gifted students to those schools where parents believe their children will be better provided for. A school with few gifted students will have difficulty laying claim to being a Smart School when compared to schools which have attracted large numbers of gifted students. This is not to denigrate the achievements of students who are not gifted. However it is a fact that the achievements of any school will be extended or restricted by the range of intellectual functioning (thinking) of its students.

If the goal is to develop Smart Schools for the Smart State, then the education of the gifted cannot be left to chance, to the enthusiasm of some or to the vagaries of funding. It must be core business in education and shown to be so by actions and by practices not just by words..

- **Differentiation:** The “2010” documents stresses differentiation:

Gagné, F. (1991), “Towards a Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent.” In N. Colangelo & G.A. Davis (Eds.) *Handbook of Gifted Education* (pp.65-80). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

There is a growing complexity in the background and circumstances of students coming to state schools from within those communities. Yet schools must work directly with that diversity and complexity to make sure all students have a successful experience of school. In short, the approach taken by different schools must match the characteristics of their communities, schools must be flexible enough to accommodate the individual learning needs of different students, and the curriculum must be sufficiently forward looking to anticipate their future life pathways and needs. Schools need to differentiate. ("2010", p. 9)

The experiences of the Focus Schools have shown how curriculum differentiation impacts upon organisational structures and impacts upon the experiences and the learning of all students. Differentiation has provided more effectively for gifted students but in ways which have benefited all.

If differentiation is to be an important strategy in the achievement of Smart Schools for the Smart State, then differentiation cannot be achieved if the education of the gifted is not core business and is left as a matter of choice. It is not differentiation when gifted children work through the same content in the same time as other students and where there is no recognition in either content or strategies of the learning characteristics of gifted students.

- **Loss of Gifted students** A concern in state education has been the numbers of students moving out of state schools and into independent schools. In his paper presented as part of the 2010 OnLine Discussion in 1999, Terry Moran, the then Director-General wrote:

In the future, the enrolment share of state schools will depend on its ability to market its achievements, the values it stands for and its quality, the value it provides to individuals and to the Queensland community. (Moran, 1999)

However in their paper also presented as part of that same OnLine discussion, Lingard and Mills, in a report on a longitudinal study they were conducting, presented findings which must be of concern in light of Moran's statement about the future. In that study, classroom observations were made of the four components of what was termed "Productive Pedagogy". Of the four components, *supportive classroom environment* was observed to be at a high level whereas, *intellectual quality* was substantially less. The third component, *relevance* was less than the results for either of the previous two components while *recognition of difference* was at a very low level. (Lingard and Mills, 1999).

The future enrolment patterns in state schools will depend, as Moran stated, on the quality of the educational environment provided and the extent to which that environment was differentiated. Yet how attractive will such schools be if they are characterised by the lack of intellectual quality and the lack of a recognition of difference noted by Lingard and Mills? Here it should be noted that the four productive pedagogies are essential characteristics of a school/classroom where there are provisions for the gifted. It is reasonable to suggest then that an important factor in the shift towards independent schools is the frustration experienced by the parents of gifted students and their belief that an independent school might have more to offer. Those parents are likely to believe that if the independent school did not offer the provisions for the gifted expected by parents, then as the ones paying the fees, they may well believe that they have some chance of influencing changes which would benefit their gifted children.³

By their use of the frameworks emphasising thinking and their strategies for differentiation as part of providing for gifted students, the Focus Schools have in fact created educational environments which reflect the four components of the Productive Pedagogy discussed above. This must be regarded as a model for developing state schools environments where the gifted are valued and challenged. If this were to be achieved across the state, it is reasonable to suggest that such a change must impact on community perceptions and help to reverse the trend away from state schools.

If state schools cannot provide effectively for gifted students, then it is questionable how the goal of Smart Schools for a Smart State could be attained and it is most unlikely that the drift to independent schools will ever be reversed.

³ My work in whole year assessments of thinking abilities has indicated that independent schools tend to have atypical populations in terms of the number of students functioning intellectually at an above average level and of these a disproportionate number can be identified as gifted.

- **Social Justice and Equity:** Throughout the course of the visits to Focus Schools, comments from parents and staff made it evident that they believed that providing for the gifted was a matter of social justice and equity. The following details, if correct, are disturbing.

In the October, 2000, QAGTC Journal, *Mindscape*, the President's Newsletter stated:

At present just over 2% of children are classified under the umbrella of special needs which attracts \$M261 in funding within the education budget. Compare this \$21,536 per student in special education facilities with \$7888 per student for secondary, \$6534 for primary and \$2827 for a preschooler (half-time). Such low incidence and so much support! (QAGTC, Oct 2000)

The view being presented becomes clear with this statement from the QAGTC Submission to the Senate Enquiry:

Access to programs is provided inequitably due to the deplorable shortage of funding. Less than \$1M per annum provided by the state government presumably serves the gifted among 440,000 children in state schools and over 160,000 children in non-state schools are similarly affected. A few attend schools which are so resource wealthy that it is possible many aspects of giftedness are inadvertently taken care of. So by our reckoning the allocated \$20.00 per gifted student per annum makes a mockery of government's fondness for alliterative slogganning such as 'clever country' and 'smart state' (QAGTC 2001)

During the visits to Focus Schools, it seemed somewhat strange to be reviewing an initiative for which the staffing allocation for the gifted initiative was between 0.5 and 1.0 FTE when each school has a Special Education Unit with higher levels of staffing supported by ancillary staff. While gifted education is a fringe operation with great fluctuations in funding. Special Education is clearly core business and no principal is able to choose whether or not to provide for special needs children and no teacher can chose to ignore their needs and provide them only with the same content as everyone else, to be taught to them in the same way and at the same time as everyone else and to be completed and mastered at the same time as everyone else.

The education of the gifted is a matter of social justice and failure to provide learning experiences which match their ability and the way they learn is to discriminate unfairly against them. It is interesting to note that parents of gifted children, who believe that their child has been discriminated against in the way the school has failed to provide for the child's needs, are unable to take their complaint to the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. This is because the Act under which the Commission must operate excludes the gifted by not including them in the group of people covered by the Act.

The inequity, the lack of social justice with which the gifted have to deal is most illustrated by comparisons between sport and education. In education, the suggestion of ability grouping has so often aroused fierce opposition from teachers. Yet the same teachers will give up time after school to extra work with the school's football team, will not complain if members of the team miss classes for special training sessions or tot travel to major competitions. To suggest that the teams should be mixed ability ones would be greeted with scorn and ridicule yet in the classroom. mixed ability is special and ability group offensive to egalitarian beliefs. Similarly to suggest the acceleration of a student will be greeted with arguments about social immaturity yet at a national swimming competition prior to the 2000 Olympics, a leading coach was asked whether he was concerned about having such a very young member on the swimming team. His reply was, "If they're good enough, they're old enough!"

In the course of this review, I received a copy of an email sent by a 16 year old student to politicians and various key people in gifted education. In one section, she discusses this inequity in the following terms:

Do we not single-out the fastest runners, longest jumpers and fastest swimmers and train them so that they can reach their potential? And not only that , but they don't seem to get big-headed, or is it that we idolise egotistical Olympians and call them good sports? The situation on the sporting fields is in fact the complete opposite to that in the classroom: In the sports area, the talented students are concentrated on, while the less-capable students are more or less forgotten. But in the classroom, the low achievers receive all sorts of attention -

fully developed and detailed remedial welfare programs, while the gifted students are ignored and their needs not met. Everyone is unique and each has to be catered for appropriately. (Balzat, 2000)

The message is clear and the social injustice is striking.

- **Thinking:** Gifted students are characterised by their very high level of intellectual function and by this I mean, thinking. The success of the Focus Schools is very much related to the extent to which they have made thinking their framework for planning and it is little wonder that gifted students have responded so positively to the programs provided for the. However the emphasis on thinking also explains why the students who are not gifted have also responded positively. When we think of gifted students in this way, that is, as individuals who are thinking at very high levels, it becomes much easier to decide on the type of program they need. They need programs which will encourage them to use more effectively the thinking abilities already present and to develop other thinking abilities.

If we then consider what should be the major emphasis in the educational programs of the Smart School, the answer I would suggest is **the development and exercise of thinking** and in such a school, the content of learning become the vehicle through which thinking is developed. Such a view is not radical and is consistent with the thrust of “2010” and with the New Basics. Indeed, it would be difficult to argue that schools are not primarily concerned with the development of thinking.

How then can providing for the gifted be a fringe activity when what they need are educational experiences which will challenge and extend their already strong thinking abilities? In other words they need the very things which are needed if we want Smart Schools for a Smart State.

Educating those who have the potential to play major roles in shaping the future should no longer be treated and thought of as a fringe activity which is only available to those who happen to be fortunate enough to live near a school where some provision is made. Nor should these students be denied an education which is appropriate to their needs, the way they think and the way they learn. To continue to deny the right of the gifted to an education which will nurture their high level of intellectual functioning so that their high learning potential will become a reality is to limit and to restrict. In other words, we will handicap the gifted and to paraphrase the statement made by a parent in my interviews: **If we handicap the gifted, we handicap the future!**

8. Action Proposals in making the gifted Core Business

The first step in providing more effectively for the gifted is to make evident that it is now Core business in Education. However, it is not enough to say that gifted education must become part of the Core Business of Education because no amount of rhetoric will make it so. The following proposals are ways in which this fundamental change may be realised.

- ◆ **Communication:** As was noted in a much earlier section of this report, it is essential that the messages given both explicitly and implicitly by Central Office and by District Offices match the policy rhetoric. Therefore if gifted education is to be core business, this must be reflected not only in the oral communications from senior staff but also in printed materials. This can be illustrated by reference to three present documents.

- The “2010” document makes only one reference to gifted students when it is stated under the heading, “New Opportunities to Learn”: *“providing special assistance and targeted programs to gifted and talented students”* (“2010”, p.16) While there is this one reference, unfortunately the following page is devoted to “A New Deal in Equity” which identifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Special Education, students with disability and at-risk groups. The message is that the gifted are not regarded as an equity issue and the one reference to them reinforces the fringe activity approach.
- “Strategic Plan 2000-2004” makes no reference to gifted students though in the section dealing with “Promoting success through Key Performance Measures” asks the question: *How well does our curriculum development and delivery meet student needs?* Then in the Outcomes statement tied to this question, it states:

The array of programs and services meet the needs of all students, including:

- *indigenous students*
- *students at educational risk*
- *students with a disability*
- *students with a learning difficulty or a learning disability (Strategic Plan, p.16)*

Again the failure to even acknowledge the existence of gifted students sends the message that they are not important and that they really aren’t in need of anything special.

- “School planning and accountability information” offers very positive statements such as: *“a new deal in equity based on the right for all students to access education and achieve outcomes consistent with their potential”* However, the documents in the folder make no reference to gifted students .

These documents have been selected as major documents from Educational Queensland but if there were to be an announcement to the effect that gifted education was to be treated as part of the core business of education, these documents will present a different view. It will be one readily seized on by those who are unwilling to make provisions for the gifted.

If then there were to be a policy that the education of the gifted is part of the core business of education., then attention must be paid in future documentation to reinforcing this policy.

- ◆ **Senior Staff:** However a key factor will be the extent to which senior staff in Education Queensland themselves hold positive attitudes towards the gifted and are able to demonstrate “awareness and knowledge about gifted education” which was one of the outcome statements relating to the staff of the Focus Schools. If teachers throughout Queensland are to be called on to provide for gifted students, then they will be quick to detect negative attitudes in those who are seen to be responsible for such a direction. Further they will be quick to note incorrect statements about the gifted and their education and should these be noted or negative attitudes detected, the progress towards the goal of gifted education being provided in all schools will be slowed down significantly. There is one step which would help to minimise the likelihood of these problems occurring and at the same time demonstrate the commitment of senior staff to the inclusion of gifted education into core business. That step would be for senior staff to undertake a professional development program on gifted education and such a program would be best conducted by the present team of Enrichment Coordinators because they are in the Education Queensland workplace and are not visiting experts. It would also be a rewarding experience for senior staff to learn at first hand the quality of these staff.
- ◆ **A new Policy Statement:** A very important and necessary step is for a new Policy Document on Gifted Education to be developed and distributed to schools. I have suggested a “new” policy but of course, the present document provides a starting point. The new policy should be clearly expressed because anything which will confuse readers will be a hindrance to gifted education. The proliferation of terms such as I have discussed previously should be avoided and whatever terms are used need to be explained.

I have already stated concerns with the use of the term “potentially gifted” and at this stage consider the problem of “gifted and talented”. The following is presented as a suggested approach to this troublesome term and as such should be part of the considerations in the development of a new policy. Throughout this report I have referred to gifted education, the education of the gifted and to giftedness. The only times when I have referred to gifted and talented has been when my comments were related to a someone else’s reference to gifted and talented. This is a deliberate act because I do not use the terms synonymously because I regard them as referring to different types of people. By the term, gifted, I am referring to a very high level of intellectual functioning and by this, I mean thinking. This giftedness indicates that the person has a High Learning Potential which if nurtured will be manifested in one or more dimensions such as academic achievement. Talented by contrast refers to a demonstrated high level of ability in one or more dimensions such creativity in art, music, writing, performance, dance, or in sporting activities, or in leadership. This talent is not accompanied by the same very high level of intellectual functioning as is the case with the gifted. This view of gifted and of talented can be illustrated as follows:

In a school orchestra performing in Fanfare, there will be some students who are gifted and many who are talented. The gifted musician is able to intellectualise the process involved in his/her musical performance and by this I mean that the gifted student is able to discuss interpretation, justify choice of music, explain why particular techniques were used and in their performance, make the audience aware of the extent to which the musician has become one with the instrument and the music to create the magic of performance. The gifted musician is more likely to excel in other areas such as academic performance - probably in mathematics - and in sport. On the other hand, the talented musician plays very well, even beautifully and the performance will give pleasure to the listener. However, the talented is less able to explain in depth the interpretation, the selection and the technique and in performance is more likely to be regarded as technically perfect but without that magic of oneness found with the gifted musician. The talented musician is less likely to be a very strong academic performer. Of course there are exceptions to this where the musician is actually gifted but this is not manifested in musical performance.

The concept of gifted which I have expressed has important implications because it emphasises that the core to giftedness is a very high level of thinking ability which is really what is meant by intelligence. This concept is consistent with the work of Geake who states in an article. “Thinking as Evolution in the Brain: Implications for Giftedness”:

Intelligence is a global term for much of the brain functioning concerned with perception, memory, learning and emoting.

Whereas superior behaviour or talent is the product of a suitable learning environment, it is the superior brain functioning of gifted individuals that enable them to take better advantage of such educational opportunities, ie, to become more knowledgeable.(Geake, 1997)

What is of particular interest were the references Geake makes to research into gifted musicians with the studies supporting my hypotheses about the gifted musician and the talented musician.

There are advantages separating gifted and talented in the manner I have suggested. Firstly by seeing giftedness as having thinking as its core, we then have a strong case for arguing that the education of the gifted is core business because as I have stated before, education has to be concerned primarily with the development of thinking. On the other hand, with talented students much of their development has to be the responsibility of parents and of outside teachers/coaches. School provides opportunities for practice and performance while specific teaching of the individual is outside the school’s responsibility.

I would recommend that the task of developing a new policy document on the education of the gifted be assigned to the Enrichment Coordinators preferably with the assistance of an external Critical Friend. I have recommended the Coordinators because they have formed a team of outstanding practitioners in gifted education and they have credibility and expertise!

- ◆ **School Planning:** Once it is made clear that the education of the gifted is now part of core business, then this must be taken down into the schools. It would need to become clear that principals do not have the choice of providing or not providing for gifted students. These students have a right to educational provisions which match their needs and this is strongly evident in key documents such as “2010”. Schools would need to be able to show in their planning for the year the steps they will take for the introduction of provisions for the gifted. Of course it would need to be made clear that this is not expected to be an overnight development but instead was one which has been well-thought through and planned in such a way as to maximise success rather than delay development.

The plan would need to build in a professional development program to develop awareness and understanding and this could utilise the Training Packages being developed by the Enrichment Coordinators though it needs

to be recognised that these packages do not eliminate the need for people such as the Enrichment Coordinators visiting the schools to assist in planning of units emphasising thinking frameworks, differentiation and compaction.

Just as a core business policy for gifted education would mean that principals do not have a choice in whether or not they provide for gifted students, in the same way, it is not a matter of choice for teachers. However, the reality is that there are some teachers who for various reasons would not wish to make provisions for the gifted in their classrooms and who would in fact be better not to work with the gifted. One solution for this problem would be to have ability grouping enabling these teachers to work with students other than the gifted.

As part of this school planning, a systematic approach to identification must be a required component. Without this, it will be too easy for schools to claim that they have no gifted students and therefore have no need to plan and provide for gifted education.

Schools will need an identification procedure for identification and there is a need to consider whether the "bubble-up" method built into the present Curriculum Model is the most suitable for widespread use in the task of helping schools to provide for their gifted students. Here the experience of the Enrichment Coordinators would be invaluable and their expertise should be utilised.

- ◆ **Focus Schools:** The Focus Schools have until the end of the year a life as a Learning and Development Centre but has their work been done? The answer to that question is very much in the negative. The schools themselves are still developing even though they now are leading schools in gifted education. Their establishment sent a clear message to other schools, namely that it was acceptable to work on providing for the gifted. To have their existence come to an end will send another message to schools, a message which reinforces the fringe activity position of gifted education. To argue that their existence is an inequity in the distribution of funds is to ignore their major contribution through their Outreach Program to the development of gifted education in other schools. To argue that the money expended on them could have been better spent providing for a larger number of schools would need to be examined in comparison with the outcomes from the period when district funds were available under the GATE Initiative. There would seem to be little effect from those programs yet the Focus Schools have provided a wide range of professional development programs which have impacted on a large number of staff.

Given that the goal should be to have all schools providing for the gifted, we need to consider how might this long process be achieved. The more usual approach is to have funds available for distribution on the basis of submissions for project money. This is what happened with the District Office funding and cannot be judged a success. Will this be a more equitable approach? Will it achieve any long term results? On the evidence so far, the answer would have to be there will still be schools who will miss out on funds and for those which receive fund there will be no guarantee that whatever happens will last beyond the period of the funding..

The better solution is to be found with the Focus School approach because they have created a strong foundation for further development. Their success has demonstrated that the approach has been an effective one and in terms of costs, it should be noted that of the \$1 million set aside annually for the GATE Initiative, only half of this money was provided for the Focus School component. Yet with this funding, they have achieved a model for other schools but their achievement should be recognised as "a work in progress". They are providing leadership in gifted education and it is only to the benefit of the system as a whole for that role to be maintained. If so, then further experiences in the Focus Schools will mean that they are able to reduce the time other schools will take in putting programs in place.

The following are ways in which the Focus School approach should be used in the state-wide development of gifted education:

- The goal should be to establish Focus Schools in each district with each school developing its programs to a level where the school becomes a model for other schools. As each Focus School develops its programs, an Outreach program is then developed to assist other schools in the region to develop effective and defensible programs for the gifted.

However the establishment of new Focus Schools should be a gradual process because selection should only be made when a school has met the criteria used in selecting the present Focus Schools. The establishment should not be based on a show of interest but should only be made once a school has demonstrated that it has some programs for the gifted already in place and there is a staff desire to move further.

- Because it is probable that there are districts in which no school is at a level which would lead to their establishment as a Focus School, there is a need for a position to be established at District Office

level. The position would be suitably designated to indicate that this teacher was to advise and support schools in developing programs for gifted students. Such a person should be accommodated in a suitable school rather than in District Office and this school placement would be to strengthen the credibility of the adviser as a teacher with experience in gifted education. Because this officer would be required to travel throughout the region in order to provide workshops, seminars, modelling and mentoring of individual or small groups of staff, the position would need to be 1.0 FTE though it might be possible to have the position as 0.5 FTE District Advisory role and 0.5FTE Enrichment Coordinator at the school where the officer is accommodated.

- As schools develop effective programs in gifted education and as one member of staff in a school assumes an increasing role in coordinating this development, schools should be able to apply for recognition of their progress and the work of the staff member providing the leadership. That recognition would be to have that teacher's role changed to 0.5FTE as Advisory Teacher and 0.5FTE as classroom teacher. This has proved most effective in the existing Focus Schools.

However such a staff position does not mean that the school has become a Focus School because the distinguishing feature for a Focus School should be its Outreach programs and its leadership in action research. Of course, in a district where no Focus School has been established, such a school as this may well become a Focus School once it satisfies the criteria for being designated a Focus School. Such a move would not result in a major increase in funding because this has not been the case with the present Focus Schools. The real funding need is in providing funds for travel, for telephone usage which is very heavy for the Enrichment Coordinators, and some funding to cover the production of materials for professional development and for information such as is provided to teachers, parents and other schools.

- As each Focus School is established and develops its Outreach program, a key task is to create a network of schools where developments in gifted education are progressing more rapidly than in other schools. These would in time become the type of school described in the previous section where an Advisory Teacher position is created.
- This approach is only an extension of the present Focus Schools approach and probably what was intended to happen over time. However what is needed is leadership and coordination at the Central Office level. At least one position at the appropriate level should be re-established with the responsibility of supporting the work of the Enrichment Coordinators and the Focus Schools and the developments which flows from these schools. Such an officer should co-ordinate the developments to monitor extension into districts where no support provision exists.
- Enrichment Coordinators and the Central Office Coordinator should be classified positions with all new appointments being made according to standard procedures of advertisement and selection through interview. Care needs to be taken that an interview panel has adequate representation of people who have demonstrated knowledge and expertise in the field of gifted education. This is important not only to ensure the quality of appointments but also to raise the profile of gifted education within the system. It can no longer be treated as area of staffing where the position is filled by the following question being asked, "Anyone interested in being the G&T person?"

All staff appointed to key positions in gifted education should undergo a training program which would include working beside an existing Enrichment Coordinator. This should even apply to an Central Office appointment because such a person must have a sound knowledge of what is happening in Focus and network schools and of what the work of the Enrichment Coordinators entails.

- The approach suggested above offers a possible career path for Enrichment Coordinators. It is very necessary for some form of career path to be provided because the Coordinators have already developed outstanding expertise in whole school approaches to gifted education. As their Outreach programs and action research projects progress, their expertise will develop even greater strength. In 2000 during the period of uncertainty, some Enrichment Coordinators were approached by the independent school sector. The state system was fortunate in not losing any of the coordinators **at that time**. The situation has only improved slightly in that their positions have been maintained until the end of this year. But after that? Whether there is a future in the work they are doing is dependent to a large extent on the acceptance of this report and its recommendations!

The real question to be addressed is whether the state system can afford to lose any of these experts in gifted education. The state system must move as quickly as possible in making gifted education core business and the key will be the work achieved by the Focus Schools and their dedicated Enrichment Coordinators. The independent sector already has an advantage in terms of the abilities level of its

student population. It seems that planning is already underway to create Focus Schools in that sector. The advantage gained by Focus Schools in a system rich in high ability students would become extremely difficult for the state system to combat if its key personnel in gifted education were to be lost to the independent system. This situation would become even worse if the system allowed the models of the Focus Schools to be replaced by the previous “unfocussed” efforts in gifted education.

◆ **Additional activities:** Two suggested areas for consideration not covered by the above discussion are as follows:

- At the Senior Secondary level of education, the provision of Extension subjects has been a very positive step in providing additional studies which are directed at the most able (gifted) students. The development of these has been limited by the budget of the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies and not by a lack of will. At present, the Board has plans for extension subjects in Music Composition, Visual Arts and Dance but is unable to progress these any further because of budgetary constraints.

The cost of the development of these extension subjects is \$40,000 per syllabus and then there are further costs in the process of actually making these syllabuses available to schools.

Ideally, these subjects should be developed and implemented. However this should be discussed as an initiative with funds for this purpose provided to the Board as part of the normal budgetary process for Education.

- In a number of major centres in the United States, Summer programs for gifted students are run by Universities where there is particular expertise in gifted education. While there are programs run by universities in Queensland, these are mostly subject specific with Mathematics and Science being the most common.

One responsibility which could be given to the proposed Central Office Coordinator would be to organise in co-operation with universities summer school programs for gifted students. Such programs would especially provide challenging and enriching experiences across a wide range of learning areas.

◆ **Funding:** The major cost in the suggested program of extending the Focus School approach is a staffing one. As I have indicated Enrichment Coordinators need some additional funds necessary for their work but the major cost is the staffing one.

In their Outreach programs, Enrichment Coordinators have found it was very useful to take with them a collection of resource materials to show teachers and which they then have allowed teachers to borrow for a limited time. This is a very important support because experience shows that if no resources are available to show teachers or if they see resources but cannot use them, this can inhibit their willingness to develop programs. It is therefore recommended that limited funding also be provided to Enrichment Coordinators to establish or strengthen their resource collection for use in professional development.

I am not convinced that schools need immediate access to funds in order to establish gifted programs. From discussions in the Focus Schools, much can be done by using existing funds if there is a clear expectation that this should be the case in making gifted education core business. Professional development should be built into the school's program in the same way that other core business areas are made part of the professional development program. It is really a question of changing priorities. Nor do schools require extra funds for resource materials initially since it needs to be realised that materials for the gifted are not limited to the gifted. For example, thinking skills material is useful for the whole school if a whole school approach is taken which emphasises thinking.

However, once a school has begun developing and implementing some programs for gifted students, then they should be able to access some funding such as has been suggested to enable a staff member to move into an Advisory Teacher role. It must be stressed that such a move should only be made when the school has demonstrated its progress and where there is a staff member who has carried the major responsibility for these developments.

When it is recognised that the approach recommended is a gradual one aimed at ensuring that gifted education becomes embedded into the life of a school and embedded into the system as core business, then the funding needs involve a gradual increase in expenditure as positions and schools come on line. However the increasing in funding which are involved must be considered in terms of the arguments for making gifted education Core business. It is not a costly endeavour if it can promote the development of Smart Schools for a

Smart State and it is not a costly endeavour if it reverses the drift of students out of state schools into independent schools.

- ◆ **Talent areas** The present provision for areas such as MOST, Fanfare and the Minister's Art Awards has provided valuable experience for gifted and for talented students in these areas. These should be continued under the Talent umbrella rather than as Gifted programs. The real concern is not with these and other programs such as the Young Conservatorium but with the way they were brought into the GATE Initiative for funding purposes. Conceptually there is not problem with these being part of the Initiative for gifted and for talented students. However the funding, which previously was available from other areas of the Education Queensland budget, should have been moved across into the GATE Initiative budget. These programs are very exciting ones, provided wonderful experiences for gifted and for talented students. However the funding for these should not be at the expense of the further development of gifted programs such as is necessary and as has been suggested. The funding should be in addition to what is presently a minimum provision for gifted education, namely the \$1million for the GATE Initiative.

Concluding Comments

The education of gifted students is vital to the future of state schools as Smart Schools. It can no longer be regarded as an option for those interested or concerned enough to want to make some provision which inevitably has had only a limited life.

This report has reviewed the work of the Focus Schools and has acknowledged their significant contribution not only to gifted education but also to education in general. Their work has challenged many of the beliefs about education of the gifted and has demonstrated that if we provide well for the gifted, we will improve the quality of the programs we offer all children.

The recommendations embedded in the report are guides to further action in bringing gifted education in from the fringe and making it part of the core business of education. Failure to do this will have serious and negative consequences for state education because we cannot have Smart Schools if we continue to lose the "Smart" students.

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