CHAPTER 2

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

> During my daughter's prep year, I accompanied the class on a farm excursion. There was obviously something wrong with one of the parrots, that was perched in a corner, looking dejected and with most of its feathers missing. The farm educator explained to the children that the parrot had a neurosis which was why it had plucked out its own feathers. Even though this parrot had come from a good home, its cage had been too small. This was a relatively common problem with pet parrots.
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> It seems to be commonly acknowledged amongst zoologists that placing animals in cages too small is damaging to their physical and emotional well being. Yet the damage done to gifted children by placing them in environments with inadequate stimulation (intellectually and socially) is treated with irreverence.[1]

Characteristics of gifted children

2.1 The subject of this report is children who display some selection of the following characteristics. 'Significantly above average for the age peer group' should be understood as relevant.

- They learn and understand material in much less time than their peers
- They have often learned to read before school age and they enjoy reading
- They tend to remember what they have learned (making reviewing previously learned concepts a painful and boring experience for them)
- Their vocabulary is often much more extensive than that of their peers
- They perceive ideas and concepts at more abstract and complex levels than their peers
- They can distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information
- They become passionately interested in specific topics
- They enjoy challenges and intellectual activities
- They have difficulty moving on to other learning tasks until they feel satisfied that they have learned as much as they possibly can about their current passionate interest
- They are able to operate on many levels of concentration simultaneously, so they can monitor classroom activities without paying direct or visual attention to them
- They have often mastered much of the year-level work previously, so they need opportunities to function at more advanced levels of complexity and depth

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1 Submission 252, confidential name, p.2

> • They often have wide interests and like to tie their own passionate interests into their schoolwork
> • They exhibit metacognitive understanding[2]
> …
> • Has rapid insight into cause-effect relationships; tries to discover the how and why of things – asks many provocative questions; wants to know what makes things or people tick.
> • Displays a great deal of curiosity about many things; is constantly asking questions about anything and everything.
> • Generates a large number of ideas or solutions to problems or questions.
> • Is uninhibited in expression of opinion.
> • Is a high risk taker.[3]
> …
> • Very alert, long attention span, advanced vocabulary, vivid imagination, more than one imaginary companion.
> • Achieves stages of literacy and numeracy earlier than age peers.[4]
> • Has taught herself to read chapter books before entering school.[5]
> • Is introverted.[6]
> • Is emotionally intense.[7]

2.2 Such lists include not only traits related to ability at schoolwork, but also more general personality traits ('introverted… passionate… emotionally intense'). The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) comments:

> It is those social-emotional traits, even more than the cognitive traits, that alert other students to the fact that a student is 'different' - and this difference may cause the different student to be distrusted or resented.[8]

2.3 The Committee suggests that one reason for different attitudes to sporting ability and intellectual or creative ability (an example raised in many submissions) may be that sporting ability is more a 'stand alone' trait, while intellectual ability seems to be more deeply bound up with the whole personality. This is taken up at paragraph 2.84.

2.4 GERRIC comments generally about the traits listed above:

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2 Submission 34, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, p.5

3 Submission 54, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, p.3-4

4 Submission 222, Dr P. Stowell, p.4,6

5 For example, submission 1, K. Price, p.1; submission 58, Yarra Plenty Gifted Support Group, p.2

6 Submission 51, Bayside Young Active Minds Support Group

7 Submission 60, L. Sword, attachment 2, p.3

8 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.20-21. The source has been edited to remove 'gifted' to focus attention on the observed behaviour before making explanatory generalisations, for reasons implied in paragraph 2.37.

> It is important to bear in mind the following points when considering the cognitive characteristics of these students:
> • Not all children will display all of the characteristics.
> • There will be a range among children in respect to each characteristic.
> • These characteristics may be viewed as developmental. Some children may not display them at early stages of development but at later stages, while others may manifest the characteristics from a very early age.
> • Characteristics tend to cluster and thus constitute different profiles across children as the combination of characteristics varies.
> • Characteristics may reveal themselves only when students engage in an area of interest and aptitude.[9]

2.5 Children who have the characteristics dotpointed above (or significant packages of them) are commonly called 'gifted' or 'highly able' or 'high intellectual potential.'

Do these children have needs warranting special intervention?

2.6 Several reasons suggest that such children should be candidates for some special intervention in the education system. The two main arguments commonly put are:

- a pragmatic or compassionate argument: these children, when denied an appropriately differentiated schooling suitable to their abilities, very often suffer underachievement, boredom, frustration and psychological distress;
- an argument of principle: we have a duty to help all children realise their potential.

2.7 Also sometimes mentioned is a 'natural resource' argument: we need to cultivate our best brains so they will contribute to our future prosperity. This was relatively little mentioned in submissions to this inquiry. It is considered at paragraph 2.32.

2.8 The underlying idea is that the pace and scope of the school curriculum should match the abilities of the child: if they do not, boredom and frustration will probably result. There is no need for sophisticated theory to predict that if a child who has been reading chapter books in preschool is asked to revert to pre-readers in primary school, there may be problems.

Neglect causes behavioural problems

2.9 Many submissions described the ill effects of denying or ignoring the special educational needs of these children. For example, the Gifted and Talented Children's Association of Western Australia reported:

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9 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.21. The source has been edited slightly to remove 'gifted' to focus attention on the observed behaviour before making explanatory generalisations, for reasons implied in paragraph 2.37.

> The recent survey of GATCA parents produced the following social/emotional problems that parents are dealing with on a daily basis. All parents see this as a direct result of having no adequate school provision for their children: Depression, Underachievement, Extreme sensitivity, Stress, Aggression, Being Bullied, Social Isolation, Perfectionism, Uneven development, Mental confusion, Frustration, Self hurt, Poor self esteem, Psychosomatic symptoms such as stomachaches and migraines, Sleep disorders, including nightmares.[10]

2.10 These problems are commonly misdiagnosed as having other psychological causes:

> I have seen four and five year old children showing signs of obsessive behaviour, frustration, depression and melancholia, and teachers completely misunderstanding the reasons why. I have seen these children grade skipped or early entered into grade one and their depressive states disappear. One child's excema (due to stress), which had been treated daily with cortisone cream, disappeared once acceleration took place.[11]

2.11 Many submissions reported a 'worrying trend' to misdiagnose behavioural problems as Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.[12]

2.12 Psychological distress may be caused not only by the lack of appropriate curriculum, but also more generally by lack of support and acceptance.

> The so called "nerds" or "weirdos" are too often the result of an unforgiving, inappropriate educational system. So often, when a child is young enough, these manifestations of stress and confusion will disappear as soon as a child is placed into an educational context that supports his or her giftedness.[13]

> [Specific problems include]… the feeling of difference from their peers, and a sense of being stigmatised and ostracised. Fear of unpopularity leads often to masking and deliberate under-achievement, rather than face the loneliness that gifted students frequently experience.[14]

2.13 The Government of Tasmania comments: 'many gifted children struggle with the dilemma of intellectual satisfaction versus peer acceptance. Promoting an

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10 Submission 270, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of Western Australia, p.7. Similarly submission 45, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of South Australia, p.4

11 Submission 18, K. Fox, p.3

12 For example, submission 42, Tasmanian Association for the Gifted, p.6. Dr G. Alsop (The CHIP Foundation), *Hansard,* Box Hill, 11 May 2001, p.5

13 Submission 39, J. Bailey, p.28

14 Submission 100, Board for Lutheran Schools, p.3

inclusive and accepting classroom climate is essential in ensuring emotional stability for gifted children.'[15]

2.14 Denying gifted children access to their intellectual peers, as a result of rigid age-based progression, may cause psychological problems:

> The research shows that the psychological problems which can develop in early childhood as a result of peer group mismatch are severe and often culminate in dire circumstances in later life. [16]

2.15 Underachievement is common. This may mean anything from achieving less than their own potential, to achieving below average, to dropping out altogether under the psychological pressures involved.

> Anecdotally we have seen a number of students aged around 15 years, usually male with high level behaviour problems, who are known to be very bright by general staff but who are leaving school for whatever reason. These students have not been identified at primary school and come to high school with well entrenched patterns of negative learning behaviour.[17]

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

> Underachieving gifted may "learn to be lazy", and may not develop necessary work habits and skills ... Another very unfortunate and all too common response is the hiding or "masking" of their ability.... to "norm reference" so as not to appear different.[18]

2.17 Dr Watters and Dr Diezmann summarise the problems:

> Social and peer pressure, rigid and inflexible school environments, and teacher indifference appear to contribute to underachievement, non-conformity, poor-attendance and low-esteem among potentially gifted children.[19]

2.18 There was little firm evidence on what proportion of gifted children suffer these problems. Presumably some do well in spite of the system if not because of it. Presumably some are like the children who, in a famous longitudinal study by Lewis Terman, were mostly well-adjusted and successful although they had to work in the classroom at levels far below their capacity.[20] However, this does mean that they were

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15 Submission 75, Government of Tasmania, p.4

16 Submission 18, K. Fox, p.3

17 Submission 255, confidential name [two South Australian school teachers], p.2

18 Submission 39, J. Bailey, p.21

19 Submission 25, Dr J. Watters & Dr C. Diezmann, p.3

20 M. Gross & B Sleap, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.20, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

probably underachieving relative to their own potential. Arguably this should be a matter of concern regardless of whether it is accompanied by behavioural problems.

2.19 One estimate from the USA is that 10-20 per cent of high school dropouts are gifted.[21] The 1988 Senate Select Committee report heard evidence suggesting that half of all gifted children underachieve at school.[22] The Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups estimates that 75 per cent of gifted students are underachievers and as many as 40 per cent leave school before the end of year 12.[23] Dr McGuigan reported research showing that some 15 per cent of children of high intellectual potential drop out of school before completing year 12.[24] Ms Byrne found that 38 per cent of her research sample are underachieving in either English or mathematics or both.[25]

2.20 Such estimates may depend on the chosen definition of 'gifted', which is a debatable point. Regardless of that, one's assessment of human suffering should not depend only on percentages. Educational authorities have a duty of care towards these children, as towards all children. The Committee is satisfied that there is a serious problem, both in relation to underachievement and more serious behavioural problems. Schools and teachers should realise that it is in their own best interests to learn to handle gifted children so they can pre-empt the behavioural problems brought on by boredom and frustration and lack of support and acceptance.

Duty to help all children realise their potential

2.21 Arguably the community, through its education systems, should feel a duty to help *all* children realise their potential. This applies regardless of whether students show behavioural problems that demand attention. Many submissions urged this, and none dissented. The principle is enshrined in the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century, agreed by the Commonwealth and State Ministers for Education in 1999. The first goal is:

> 1. Schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students.

2.22 Other sections of the Adelaide Declaration approve 'enthusiasm for learning', 'the pursuit of excellence' and 'a diverse range of educational choices and aspirations'.[26]

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21 Submission 25, Dr J. Watters & Dr C. Diezmann, p.3

22 Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, *The Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, 1988, par.5.14

23 Submission 54, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, p.5

24 Submission 10, Dr K. McGuigan, p.4

25 G. Byrne (The CHIP Foundation), *Hansard,*, Box Hill, 11 May 2001, p.154

26 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century*, 1999

2.23 A contrary view is that the duty of the education system is limited to ensuring that all students reach minimum standards supposed to be necessary to preserve a healthy, prosperous society. Some children may go further, but they have no entitlement to special help in going further.[27]

2.24 In the Committee's view this idea has no merit. With the first goal of the Adelaide Declaration, quoted above, all Australian governments explicitly reject it. Certainly it is right that a key goal of the education system should be to help all students reach minimum standards, and this is a key element of the Adelaide Declaration.[28] However, that does not mean the goals of education need to be limited to this. Achieving standards for all can and should co-exist with fostering the individual potential of each. This requires intervention for gifted children as for the disabled.

They will succeed anyway?

2.25 It is often argued that gifted children do not need special interventions because they will succeed anyway. Many submissions reported this argument. For example, according to the Government of Tasmania, 'resistance [to special provisions] stems from the belief that the gifted will succeed regardless, whereas students of lesser ability need special attention to encourage success.'[29]

2.26 The Committee does not accept this view, as all the evidence suggests otherwise. Without acceptance, support, and appropriately differentiated education, many gifted children will succeed regardless, but many will not. The evidence on this point is convincing.[30]

> The catch-cries of "talent will out" and "the cream will rise to the top" derive from the assumption that all students of high ability will succeed, and that therefore those who *do* succeed (and are therefore most easily identifiable as gifted or talented) represent the full quota of those who have potential. Like most simplistic arguments, it is extremely seductive; however it is contradicted by the many studies of underachievement and serious demotivation among academically gifted children and adolescents.[31]

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27 For example, M. Bibby, 'The entitlement to realise potential', *Professional Ethics*, vol.6 no.3, 1998, p49ff: 'It is much more plausible to assume that there is a minimum acceptable rate of education, and that it does not matter much if some students achieve at a much faster rate and others do not.'

28 'Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society… investment in schooling to enable all young people to engage effectively with an increasingly complex world.' Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century*, 1999, preamble.

29 Submission 75, Government of Tasmania, p.2

30 The intended meaning of 'succeed' is relevant. If it means 'reach an acceptable minimum standard' as suggested in paragraph 2.23, presumably more children will 'succeed' without special help, though they may still be underachieving relative to their own potential.

31 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.100

2.27 This mistaken belief is most detrimental to poorer or minority children. Gifted children from wealthier families have more out of school enrichment and support, while gifted children from poorer families depend more on what the school can do for them. Without help in the school, better-off children are more likely to succeed regardless, while disadvantaged children are more likely to grow up with their potential unrealised.

Emphasis on minimum standards discourages high achievement?

2.28 The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling states the need to 'develop fully the talents and capacities of all students'. However it also has a strong emphasis on ensuring that all students meet minimum standards. The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) commented:

> With their strong focus on student outcomes, the national goals provide a framework for measuring performance in key areas in a nationally comparable way … national benchmarks are already agreed for primary and lower secondary literacy and numeracy, and performance measures are being put in place in areas such as science, vocational education and training (VET) in schools and the participation and attainment of young people.[32]

2.29 The Adelaide Declaration specifies the need to bring the outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students up to standard. Beyond the general statement in head goal 1 ('schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students'), it does not make any reference to the idea of helping all students reach their *individual* potential. It speaks of 'the entitlement of all young people to high quality schooling', but it does not make any clear statement to effect that 'quality' means, among other things, 'suitably differentiated to respond to individual needs'.

2.30 Some submitters were concerned that this emphasis on benchmarks may discourage paying due attention to the special needs of the gifted. For example, the Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training said:

> Currently benchmarks focus on achievement not potential. This provides insufficient data to plan for gifted students. The response to benchmarks tends to be on bringing the bottom group up without extending the top group.[33]

2.31 The New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) commented that 'it is the nature of educational politics that any factor which is measured and reported has an advantage in attracting scarce resources and policy attention.' NSW DET suggested that the national reporting framework should be expanded to focus on not only minimum benchmarks but also high aspirations, and

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32 Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, p.1

33 Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.14. Similarly submission 102, Catholic Education South Australia, p.5; submission 47, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, p.5

MCEETYA should develop high achievement targets for gifted children.[34] The Committee agrees.

Recommendation 1

MCEETYA should expand the national reporting framework for school education to focus on not only minimum benchmarks but also high achievement targets for gifted children.

Adult achievement of gifted children

2.32 The contribution that gifted children may make to the society and economy of the future is sometimes put forward. Submissions speak of the need to stop the brain drain, or a 'loss of talent at the national level' or 'the contribution they can yet make to society'. They ask whether one of the children the subject of this inquiry will be the next Bill Gates, or will discover a cure for cancer.[35]

2.33 The Committee does not think that this argument should be overemphasised. First, the effect of gifted education interventions on adult achievement seems to be not very well known.[36] Second, the highest achievement, at the level that makes a lasting personal contribution to society, depends on many things other than giftedness - including other personal qualities such as motivation, as well as opportunity and luck. For every person who achieves at this level there are a thousand whose valuable contribution to society is simply to be educated, involved, well-adjusted citizens. A prime goal of the education system should be to help gifted children, like any other children, take that role.

> These children have no greater obligation than any other children to be future leaders or world-class geniuses. They should just be given a chance to be themselves ... and to have an education that appreciates and serves these behaviours.[37]

2.34 Third, the rhetoric of promoting the highest achievement could encourage a narrow focus on the more highly gifted; or it could be misunderstood that way. The implied elitism of this would be unlikely to win popular acceptance. The benefits of gifted education approaches can and should be spread widely. This is taken up at paragraph 3.79.

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34 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.vii.,32. T. Alegounarias (NSW DET), *Hansard*, Sydney 16 July 2001, p.384

35 For example submission 10, Dr K. McGuigan, p.7; submission 100, Board for Lutheran Schools, p.3; submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.4; submission 241, confidential name, p.3, submission 257, confidential name, p.3

36 Submission 75, Government of Tasmania, p.5

37 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.5

2.35 Fourth, to emphasise gifted education programs as a means of preparing some children for high-achieving careers will tend to increase the anxiety of those who are hostile to gifted education programs because they see them as the means by which a privileged class passes privilege to its children.[38]

2.36 In the Committee's view the right approach is to stress that the prime purpose of special interventions for gifted children is to respond humanely to their special needs as children at school. If later they contribute to society more than they might have otherwise, so much the better; but that is a collateral benefit, not the purpose of the intervention.

Problems of defining 'gifted'

2.37 To this point in the argument it has not been necessary to define 'gifted' or to suggest what proportion of children are gifted. The Committee has simply observed that some children have traits, generalised as 'high ability', which suggest a need for special educational interventions. The Committee suggests that educators should focus on this practical need. Lack of agreement on definitions does not justify ignoring the needs of gifted children.

2.38 However, definitions are important. Concepts of giftedness, such as the ones which follow, have a political dimension in that they are used to justify positions about what the scope of official interest should be and what sort of interventions should be made.

Concepts of giftedness

2.39 While conceptions of giftedness have broadened considerably over the last 100 years, they share three important common elements:

- gifted children have the potential for unusually high performance in at least one area.
- the capacity to think clearly, analytically and evaluatively is a prerequisite for high performance in any area.
- gifted children are not always successful. The child's personality and environment can help or hinder the translation of potential into performance. [39]

2.40 In 1957 in the United States **DeHaan and Havinghurst** proposed six domains of giftedness:

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38 For example, Australian Education Union, *Policy on Curriculum*, 1993, par. 12.9: '…segregation on supposed academic ability groups also serves to artificially perpetuate from generation to generation access to such powerful positions [in society] through the route of segregated schooling.' Attachment to submission 33, AEU

39 Paragraphs 2.39-2.44 are summarised from submission 215, GERRIC, p.8ff and from M. Gross & B Sleap, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.20ff, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

- intellectual ability
- creative thinking
- scientific ability
- social leadership
- mechanical skills
- talent in the fine arts

2.41 A child could be gifted in only one domain or several. They regarded 'intellectual ability' as most directly related to school subjects and emphasised that it encompassed verbal, numerical, spatial, memory and reasoning abilities.[40]

2.42 **The Marland Report** in the United States (1971) defined gifted and talented children as those identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance.[41] Children capable of high performance included those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:

- general intellectual ability
- specific academic aptitude
- creative or productive thinking
- leadership ability
- visual and performing arts
- psychomotor ability.

2.43 **Joseph Renzulli** (1978) developed a 'three-ring' definition of giftedness which proposed that giftedness was the interaction between three basic clusters of human traits: above average general ability; high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity.[42] However many feel that this ignores the gifted underachiever, who is rarely described as 'task-committed'. Furthermore, many fields of performance do not require creativity.

2.44 **Françoys Gagné** (1985) argued that 'Giftedness corresponds to competence which is distinctly above average in one or more domains of ability.'[43] Gagné suggests four major domains of ability: intellectual, creative, socioaffective and sensori-motor. Talent refers to performance which is distinctly above average in one or more fields of human performance. A child can be gifted (possessing unusually high potential) without being talented (displaying unusually high performance). Personal qualities

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40 DeHaan, R.F. and Havighurst, R.J. (1957). *Educating gifted children.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

41 Marland, S.P, (1971) *Education of the gifted and talented. Volume I: Report to the Congress of the United States by the Commissioner of Education.* Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.

42 Renzulli, J.S. (1978). What makes giftedness: Reexamining a definition. *Phi Delta Kappa, 60.* 180 - 184, 261.

43 Gagné, F. (1985). Giftedness and talent: Reexamining a reexamination of the definitions. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 29,* 103 -112.

and environmental variables can facilitate or impede the translation of giftedness into talent. These include the child's motivation, the quality of the teaching and parenting, the provisions the school makes, and the social ethos of the community which can dictate which talents are valued.

2.45 According to Gross and Sleap, Gagné's model has gained wide acceptance in Australia. It recognises the gifted student who may be underachieving, demotivated, or prevented from realising his or her potential by environmental, personality or physiological constraints.[44] Others are concerned that models such as Gagné's are 'trapped by the metaphor of "gifts"' and 'believe that the most important aspect of being gifted is the ability to turn gifts into recognisable and valued accomplishments.'[45]

2.46 **Howard Gardner** (1985) proposed a theory of multiple quasi-autonomous intelligences - linguistic, musical, logico-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, and personal.[46] The Committee was told that this has had 'huge impact' on the design of specialised curricula for gifted students.[47] The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre is concerned that Gardner's model has 'very limited research base' and 'has become something of a fad in Australian educational circles.'

> It is particularly popular among teachers who would wish to claim that every child is gifted …. It is disturbing to note that Gardner's "multiple intelligences" theory has influenced the development of definitions of giftedness in the policy documents of a number of Australian states.[48]

2.47 According to Dr Alsop, 'As a result of educators embracing this alternative way of viewing intelligence they have been distracted – some might say, relieved – from confronting the reality of the range of learning potential in their classrooms….'

> It is easier to keep children busy designing a chook shed, writing a school song and forming the letter "A" with one's body (all examples have been taken from a "multiple intelligences" curriculum guide) than it is to *teach* the bright-eyed fast learning child addition and subtraction of fractions, or an enriched vocabulary by which to express their understanding of their world.[49]

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44 M. Gross & B Sleap, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.24, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

45 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.6

46 Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books

47 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.7

48 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.17-18

49 Submission 67, Dr G. Alsop, p.3-4

Are all children gifted?

2.48 Submissions reported the view that 'all children are gifted'. They argued that this view is commonly put by schools or teachers to justify refusing to intervene on behalf of a particular child: if all children are gifted, then to give special treatment to *this* gifted child would be unfair:

> As one school classically put it before refusing to provide additional facilities "all our children are gifted in one way or the other" … The perception appears to be that these children have somehow been 'blessed' with an additional ability that sets them aside from other children and, just like a child who has already received a present, they have to sit back whilst the others receive theirs.[50]

2.49 On the other hand, several submissions agreed that 'all children are gifted'. These were usually parties who stress an inclusive approach and the need to enrich the education of all children, in preference to special intervention for some.[51] The Committee was told it was an official definition during the 1980s in South Australia.[52] A variant is 'most children are gifted at *something*'.[53]

2.50 This view finds natural support in the multiple intelligences theory, since multiple unrelated intelligences make it seem more plausible that, if only by chance, each child *will* be gifted in something. It is made more plausible still by enlarging the number of potential 'somethings' - that is, by enlarging the range of fields of endeavour which are supposedly of interest. Thus 'all children are gifted at something' goes naturally with emphasising a broad scope of 'giftedness'. At the limit, it leads to statements like:

> In particular giftedness in non-traditional subjects, sport, the arts, vocational education and training, citizenship and extra-curricular work *should be given the same attention* as giftedness in the traditional curriculum.[54] [emphasis added]

2.51 The Committee does not agree. Giftedness in all valued fields of endeavour should be acknowledged and supported, but this does not prove that they deserve the same attention - if that means the same priority and resources for intervention. The focus should be on needs. The nature of intervention should depend on the nature of

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50 Submission 44, I. Bett, p.3. Similarly submission 270, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of Western Australia, p.22, quoting typical comments from teachers: 'All students are unique individuals with unique gifts and talents.'

51 For example, Submission 46, South Australian Association of School Parents Clubs Inc, p.1. Submission 49, Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Inc., p.2. Submission 96, Catholic Education Office [Tasmania], p.1.

52 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.2

53 Submission 214, Australian Council of State School Organisations, p.6

54 Submission 214, Australian Council of State School Organisations, p.2

the need and the benefits that intervention can bring. These may be different in different areas. This is picked up at paragraph 2.59.[55]

2.52 'All children are gifted' is obviously inconsistent with the scholarly concepts of giftedness described above. All children cannot be of outstanding ability relative to their age peers any more than all children can be of outstanding height. 'All children are gifted' may be intended to mean 'all children have personal strengths' or 'all children can do things that excite our wonder' or 'all children are equal in the eyes of God.' These are commendable statements, but to connect them with 'gifted', when 'gifted' more commonly refers to significantly high ability relative to the peer group, causes confusion.

2.53 Alternatively, 'all children are gifted' could mean 'all children have high ability *at something'*. This statement is commonly allied with 'gifted children tend to be gifted in only one area'.[56] Both statements support egalitarian preferences by downplaying the differentness of high ability. Whether they are true should easily be shown by research into the correlations between individuals' performance in different fields of endeavour. It could be that most children are gifted at something, while some children are gifted at most things. Or it could be that many children are not gifted at anything, but rather are close to average at everything.

2.54 According to the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, the idea that gifted children tend to be gifted in only one area is not supported by research:

> For example, mathematical ability and musical ability are not two separate "intelligences" as proposed by Gardner; they are aptitudes which teachers of maths and teachers of music happily acknowledge to be quite highly correlated … Unfortunately teachers who adhere too closely to the "multiple intelligences" theory are reluctant to acknowledge that students who achieve highly in one area of academic work are likely to have the potential to achieve highly in other areas …. Indeed, the more highly gifted the student, the greater the likelihood that he or she will possess high abilities in a range of fields. Virtually every study conducted of exceptionally and profoundly gifted children (e.g. Hollingworth, 1942; Gross, 1993; Rogers and Silverman, 1997) has found that these children possess remarkably high abilities in many academic subject areas.[57]

2.55 Mr Imison comments:

> At regular intervals, the view is expressed that single attribute giftedness is the norm while multifaceted giftedness is the exception. Such a view is a

55 The Committee acknowledges that by 'attention' the submitter may have meant only 'recognition'.

56 For example, Submission 214, Australian Council of State School Organisations, p.6: 'The field of human endeavour is immense and rapidly expanding. It is impossible for an individual to be gifted in more than a fraction of the total, and most will be gifted in something.'

57 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.17-18

> denial of what research has shown and what experience has shown many key people working in gifted education. An examination of the interests and extra-curricular activities of groups of secondary students achieving at the highest levels in international competitions will demonstrate the multi-dimensional nature of giftedness.[58]

2.56 It is possible that 'all children are gifted at something' or 'gifted children tend to be gifted in only one area' are put because people are uncomfortable with the idea that different children's abilities and endowments are not equal. The Committee suggests that this discomfort is increased by the connotation of general superiority that is often attached to 'high intelligence'. It is essential to disconnect intellectual 'giftedness' from the idea of general moral superiority. People should be encouraged to see high intellectual ability in the same light as 'high sporting ability' - a potentially valuable trait which however says nothing about the underlying moral or spiritual worth of the whole person.

> We strive for sameness in education outcomes, rather than providing equal opportunities to develop differing potentialities, because educational outcomes have [wrongly] become a metric for human worth. Yet human dignity and worth should be assessed only in terms of those qualities of mind and spirit that are within the reach of every human being.[59]

Official definitions: defining the scope of interest

2.57 There have been many official 'definitions of giftedness'. For example:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realise their contribution to self and society.[60]

> The "gifted", for the purposes of the schools, are those individuals who by way of learning characteristics such as superior memory, observational powers, curiosity, creativity, and the ability to learn school-related subject matters rapidly and accurately with a minimum of drill and repetition, have a right to an education that is differentiated according to these characteristics.[61]

> The Department for Education and Children's Services will ensure that gifted children and students are identified and receive specific educational

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58 Submission 26, K. Imison, p.2

59 C.P. Benbow & J.C. Stanley, 'Inequity in Equity': how "equity" can lead to inequity for high potential students', *Psychology, Public Policy and Law,* vol.2 no.2, 1996, p.256

60 The Marland report to the US Congress, 1971, quoted in M. Gross & B Sleap, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.7, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

61 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.5

> attention. A 'gifted' child or student will possess, to an outstanding degree, demonstrated ability or potential in one or more of the following areas:
> • general intelligence
> • specific academic areas
> • visual and performing arts
> • psychomotor ability
> • leadership
> • creative thinking
> • interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.[62]
>
> Students who are gifted are students who show advanced development, or who have the capacity for advanced development, in any valued area relative to their age peers, to a degree that modification to their educational program is necessary.[63]

2.58 Such 'definitions' are really statements about the desirable scope of interest and, implicitly, a guide to intervention. Typically they include an explanatory generalisation which links the behaviours dotpointed at the beginning of this chapter ('outstanding general intelligence … superior ability to learn'); a reference to fields of endeavour *that are valued*; and a specification that the focus is on circumstances that suggest a need for intervention.

Which fields of endeavour are a focus for intervention?

2.59 A broad scope of giftedness affirms the value of a variety of fields of endeavour, but it should not be read as a claim that all fields of endeavour deserve equal priority for intervention. Special intervention is worthwhile only where it is needed and can do some good. Where intervention is needed, the amount of effort needed may be different in different fields of endeavour.

2.60 As to what is a reasonable scope of interest for planning interventions, Professor Start comments:

> The Australian and State Institutes of Sport are not looking for gifted singers, for musicians, for creative painters or sculptors or leaders or even intellectuals but just for athletes … The Royal Academy of Art and the Colleges of the Arts do not look for athletes, football players or linguists … Soccer Australia is looking for those with potential in soccer not in tennis or cricket. Tennis Australia and Cricket Australia are looking for these. All these groups focus on a definition and try to identify those they perceive as having outstanding potential within that definition … Only in education do we seem to set out deliberately to confuse the issue …. Should not this

62 Submission 209, Government of South Australia, attachment 1, *Policy Statement - Gifted Children and Students*

63 Submission 75, Government of Tasmania, p.2

> nettle be grasped and these children identified clearly as children of high *intellectual* potential rather than 'gifted'?[64]

2.61 This proposes a scope of interest focussed towards the academic curriculum. This was the realm of interest of most submissions, and is implicit in some suggested alternative terms for 'gifted', such as 'advanced academic ability' or 'academically talented'.[65]

2.62 In the Committee's view an appropriate scope of interest for this report, considering the special needs mentioned in many submissions, is 'high intellectual or creative ability'. High ability in sport or extra-curricular activities (examples which some submissions mentioned), however worthy, is different in relation to deciding needs and planning interventions. Some reasons for this are:

- These things occupy relatively little time in the school week, and they are more likely to be optional.
- Issues to do with identification of giftedness are different.[66]
- In the argument of many submissions giftedness in these fields of endeavour is already more accepted and better handled in the school system. In particular, grouping based on skills without regard to age is much more accepted.
- In these areas the gifted are more likely to have opportunities outside the school.[67]

2.63 As a result, children gifted in these areas probably suffer less from bad curriculum than those gifted in academic schoolwork generally. This proposition is supported by the weight of submissions. Almost all parent stories in submissions were about badly handled giftedness in literacy and numeracy. Hardly any complained that their children were suffering because of badly handled giftedness in sport or extra-curricular activities.

2.64 The Committee affirms the importance of sport and extra-curricular activities in school education. Effort and achievement in these fields should be encouraged and praised just as much as in academic subjects. The point here is that if we say that high ability in these fields is no different from high intellectual or creative ability, we risk paying insufficient attention to the special needs of children with high intellectual or creative ability.

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64 Submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.6

65 Submission 270, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of Western Australia, p.3

66 Arguably, in these fields of endeavour recognising potential more closely depends on the opportunity for performance. No-one knows how fast a child can run until she starts running. General intellectual ability is more likely to be identifiable by various associated behaviours such as those dotpointed at the top of this chapter, even where there is no high performance in a valued field of endeavour.

67 Dr C. Diezmann, *Hansard*, Brisbane, 23 March 2001, p.13

2.65 The Committee concludes that many arguments about the proper definition of giftedness can be bypassed simply by saying that the scope of practical interest extends as far as intervention is needed and useful. As Dr Geake put it:

> My approach is pragmatic, and for some while I have promoted an operational definition of giftedness as applying to those students who could benefit from a gifted education program. The circularity is deliberate – the strategy is to label programs, not children.[68]

2.66 The Committee acknowledges that there is a political dimension to defining giftedness: a broader definition is held out to win public support for the concept of special provisions. For example, the Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training advised that it uses a deliberately broad definition of giftedness 'to ensure maximum *acceptance* and inclusion.' [emphasis added][69]

2.67 In this context it should be stressed that to focus on 'giftedness' as 'high intellectual or creative ability' is not intended to, nor does it limit the number of children involved, since all children study in many fields that are relevant. It is widely argued, and the Committee agrees, that interventions to support gifted children have knock-on benefits for all children. This is taken up at paragraph 3.79.

What proportion of children are gifted?

2.68 Official definitions of giftedness sometimes include some claim about what proportion of children are expected to be involved. The 1971 Marland report mentioned at paragraph 2.42 glossed its domains of ability: 'It can be assumed that utilisation of these criteria for identification of the gifted and talented will encompass a minimum of 3 to 5 percent of the school population'. The British Government requires all schools to identify some 5 to 10 per cent of students who may benefit from a gifted education program. The CHIP Foundation uses 5 per cent. 10 per cent is a widely accepted figure suggested by Francoys Gagné.

2.69 Focussing on the concept of 'gifted *in something'* enlarges the reach of giftedness. According to Education Queensland 'a notable trend is for teachers trained in gifted education to observe more widely and inclusively … To maintain a broader, more inclusive approach, it is considered likely that between ten percent and twenty five percent (not two percent as believed earlier) of a population is potentially gifted in some field.'[70] A recent British report suggested:

> The evidence suggests that one can usefully talk about a very large cohort, with smaller, overlapping groups within it. If we consider children who are

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68 Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, p.4

69 Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.4

70 M. Gross & B Sleap, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.7,21, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, p.4. Submission 41, CHIP Foundation, p.3. Submission 31, Education Queensland, p.8

> in the top 20 per cent as regards all-round ability or ability in a particular area (or 'intelligence'), one might find that up to 30-40 per cent of pupils in a school are included. Within this figure, teachers tend to think of the *very* able as being five per cent and the *exceptionally* able maybe two per cent or even only one per cent.[71]

2.70 All such percentages are arbitrary. They simply specify what the writer is thinking of in using indeterminate measure words like 'high', 'superior', 'outstanding' etc. Intellectual ability varies among individuals along a continuum - the normal distribution or bell curve. There are many moderately gifted children, and very few profoundly gifted. The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre suggested the following definitions:

		incidence in the population
mildly or basically gifted	IQ 115-129	1in 6 to 1 in 44
moderately gifted	IQ 130-144	1 in 44 to 1 in 1,000
highly gifted	IQ 145-159	1 in 1,000 to 1 in 10,000
exceptionally gifted	IQ 160-179	1 in 10,000 to 1 in 1 million
profoundly gifted	IQ 180+	fewer than one in 1 million[72]

2.71 The necessary interventions will vary greatly between the moderately gifted and the profoundly gifted.

2.72 The percentages in paragraph 2.68 and the labels in the table above are arbitrary, but this does not mean they are untruthful or irrelevant. They do not represent exact cut-off points, but rather are a practical guide to what approximate proportion of the population we might expect to be candidates for some proposed intervention. Stating percentages as a target for intervention may also serve a deliberate political purpose. Gifted children are found in all ethnic and socio-economic groups, but it is well known that untrained teachers are more likely to notice giftedness in the dominant culture and less likely to notice it in poorer or minority groups. A target applied to all schools prevents schools in poorer areas from denying that they have gifted children.

2.73 Some submissions were concerned that the arbitrariness of such percentages somehow invalidates the exercise of identifying giftedness. They were concerned about the implications of 'labelling' some children gifted and (by implication) others not. For example, the Australian Education Union (AEU) said:

> It [the AEU] does not disagree that some students may be considered more able than others in relation to certain criteria. However, in relation to any criterion, students are ranged along a continuum. It is not desirable to create

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71 House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, *Highly Able Children*, 1999, par. 36

72 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.15

> divisions in this continuum, and thereby class some children as gifted or talented, and, by inference, the remainder as not gifted or not talented. This involves decisions which are arbitrary, undesirable, unnecessary and counter productive.[73]

2.74 The Committee does not agree. Identifying the variety of student abilities is not about creating divisions: it is about planning interventions intelligently having regard to the different degrees of need. Professor Start commented:

> Such an argument is never raised in other domains. If, in the hearing impaired, the 'Profound' diagnosis is at 90 decibels, it is really no different than 89 ('Severe'). If the argument is continued then the definition can slide by integers through moderate to mild and then to the baseline of normal hearing. Is it therefore true that there is no difference between a normal and a profoundly impaired child? … Scores establish points at which specific intervention might be most profitably introduced … Identification criteria are guidelines for intervention, not tattoos on the child's forehead.[74]

2.75 Because of these concerns schools are often discreet about labelling, and find various terms to replace 'gifted'. As a practical response to sensitivities about differentness there is nothing particularly wrong with this, providing it does not slide into an attitude that there is no need for intervention.

Reasons for problems in gifted education

2.76 There are a number of reasons for the reported problems in the education of gifted children. Some submitters are concerned about competition for resources, though the Committee does not think this should be a major issue. This is taken up at paragraph 3.146. Well-meaning ignorance, lack of confidence and mistaken beliefs among teachers untrained in this specialty are important:

> I have been in the state system for more than 27 years … I have rarely met a teacher in all that time who deliberately denied education to a child … In general, our teachers are carers and sharers, but then where is the glitch? What prevents them from recognising giftedness in all its various guises and for dealing appropriately with those students? The fact is that despite the research—and we have much of it, both Australian and international—teachers still remain unable to understand the characteristics of gifted and talented children. On our visits to schools, they freely admit that they find it difficult to identify those students, and once they are identified for them they find it extremely difficult to know what to do to provide for them. They are actually scared of making those decisions.[75]

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73 Submission 33, Australian Education Union. p.4. Similarly submission 214, Australian Council of State School Organisations, p.2

74 Submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.8

75 K. Coughlan (Professional Association of Parents and Teachers (Gifted and Talented Students)), *Hansard*, Perth, 3 July 2001, p.177

2.77 The need for better teacher training to remedy well-meaning ignorance and lack of confidence is a theme throughout this report.

2.78 As well, negative underlying attitudes are widely reported. These matters interact. Lack of training and confidence in teaching gifted children may cause teachers to avoid the issues. Where there are negative attitudes it is less likely that teachers will be aware of their ignorance. Prejudice favours mistaken beliefs which tend to support the prejudice. Underlying attitudes determine the priority that people are willing to give to an issue.

> Any amount of money thrown at this problem will not necessarily change attitudes, and changing attitudes does not require money; it requires willpower.[76]

2.79 Many submissions reported negative attitudes to high intellectual ability - among school managements, teachers, and the community at large. They contrasted negative attitudes to high intellectual ability with positive attitudes to high sporting ability. They asked 'Why is this so?' in a rhetorical way but few tried to answer their own question. Yet the Committee believes it is important to take the question seriously. Attitudes cannot be changed unless they are first understood.

Anti-elitism

2.80 Many submissions referred to anti-elitist attitudes, or to the supposed Australian fondness for cutting down tall poppies. Dr Watters & Dr Diezmann reported 'a degree of apathy and opposition to gifted education exists within the [teaching] profession'.[77] The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) reported that 'parents of the gifted who approach the school to discuss their children's high abilities are very often disbelieved.'[78] Parents reported the difficulties of broaching the subject with unsympathetic schools or teachers:

> Many [parents] … find that public perception of the term gifted means that the children and parents are ostracised, seen as "having tickets on themselves", and parents are seen as "pushy" parents who have "hot housed" their children.[79]

2.81 Research shows that teachers tend to prefer students not to be too studious:

> It was found that the primary preservice teachers generally considered the average student more desirable than the gifted, with a clear preference for students not to be studious …. being gifted and striving towards academic

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76 R. Collins (Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups), *Hansard*, Box Hill, 11 May 2001, p.135

77 Submission 25, Dr J. Watters & Dr C. Diezmann, p.4

78 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.29

79 Submission 270, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of Western Australia, p.3.

> success at school does not appear to elicit the support one would imagine from future classroom teachers.[80]

2.82 This does not bode well for the atmosphere of support and acceptance that is essential for gifted child to flourish at school. The implications are serious for the learning of all children, not only gifted children:

> School is a place for learning. The message we give to *all children* about learning is linked in part to how we treat our most rapid learners. If they are ignored, exploited, damaged, held back in their progress, or teased, the message we give to all children is that academic learning doesn't pay for anyone.[81]

2.83 GERRIC quoted research suggesting that 'the major obstacle to their receiving appropriate provision was the attitude among educators and the general public that the ability to relate well to others was of prime importance, with the concomitant fear that any school procedures that single students out as more able might jeopardise this overriding concern'.[82]

2.84 What are the causes of anti-elitist or anti-intellectual attitudes? They are not distinctively Australian and, therefore, to refer back to 'the Australian character' is not sufficient explanation of them. For example, very similar attitudes (including references to tall poppies and comparisons with sport) are reported in the USA and the UK.[83] The comparison with sport is a useful entry point, since here attitudes are most obviously contradictory. The Committee suggests that some reasons for different attitudes could be:

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80 M. Gross & B Sleap, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.73, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. N. Carrington & S. Bailey, 'How do preservice teachers view gifted students? Evidence from a NSW study', *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*, vol. 9 no. 1, 2000, p.18-22. Similarly for the USA: 'Experienced teachers seemed to prefer the average student, not the brilliant one.' C.P. Benbow & J.C. Stanley, 'Inequity in Equity': how "equity" can lead to inequity for high potential students', *Psychology, Public Policy and Law,* vol.2 no.2, 1996, p.259. The information supplied to the Committee from these sources leaves it unclear whether these attitudes reflect an underlying anti-intellectualism or simply the practical convenience of teaching a homogenous group. In context of the submissions, we assume the former.

81 C.P. Benbow & J.C. Stanley, 'Inequity in Equity': how "equity" can lead to inequity for high potential students', *Psychology, Public Policy and Law,* vol.2 no.2, 1996, p.260

82 M. Gross & B Sleap, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.73, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. N. Carrington & S. Bailey, 'How do preservice teachers view gifted students? Evidence from a NSW study', *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*, vol. 9 no. 1, 2000, p.18-22.

83 For example, C.P. Benbow & J.C. Stanley, 'Inequity in Equity': how "equity" can lead to inequity for high potential students', *Psychology, Public Policy and Law,* vol.2 no.2, 1996, p.258,260,272: '[Among high school students] athleticism was most valued … the brilliant-studious-non-athlete was least desired.' [British] House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, *Highly Able Children*, 1999, par. 46: 'Academic excellence is not always seen in a positive light by either school pupils or British culture generally … In many schools it is not seen as 'cool' to be bright. More able pupils are called "swots", "clever clogs" etc.'

- In sport the nature of the endeavour is visible to all. For many high academic achievement is a closed book. People are less likely to praise a field of endeavour which they do not understand.
- Attitudes to high sporting ability may be more forgiving, because, paradoxically, it is *only* sport. We accept that our sporting heroes, in other aspects of their lives, may be clever or dull, good-tempered or bad. Apart from their sporting prowess they are visibly one of us. High intellectual ability, arguably, is seen as a more fundamental part of the whole personality - a personality that is different from the norm.
- Sport is only sport, but high intellectual ability is closely bound up with one's place in society and one's prospect of worldly success throughout life. This arouses concern among those who emphasise the role of education as a social equaliser. The Australian Education Union commented:

> Analogies with sports programs, which seem to be very popular with some advocates of segregated programs, are on the one hand spurious, and on the other illustrative. Such programs do not have the same *universal objectives* as education, and are therefore inappropriate for comparison.[84] [emphasis added]

- Arguably 'high intelligence' has a connotation of general superiority which arouses resentment.

> Bereiter (1976-77), for example, asked undergraduates if their intellectual ability, on the whole, was higher than individuals not attending college. The undergraduates denied being higher in intellectual ability. Bereiter commented that he doubted whether music students attending a conservatory would deny having greater musical ability, that art students attending an art institute would deny having greater artistic skills, or that college athletes would deny having greater athletic prowess! Yet it was, and still is, unacceptable to admit that one has greater intellectual capabilities. Why? Bereiter suggested that, 'IQ is like money. Publicly you proclaim that those who have a lot are no better than those who have a little. Privately, you wish you had a lot.' It seems that being talented in academics engenders envy of which hardly any other talent is quite capable. [85]

2.85 The thought necessary to complete the explanation is that the college students were downplaying their high intellectual ability in order to defend themselves against envy. This recalls the phenomenon, which many submissions reported, of gifted children masking their ability in order to be accepted by their teachers or peer group.[86]

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84 Submission 33, Australian Education Union, p.5

85 C.P. Benbow & J.C. Stanley, 'Inequity in Equity': how "equity" can lead to inequity for high potential students', *Psychology, Public Policy and Law,* vol.2 no.2, 1996, p.260

86 'Australian research shows that adolescents tend to socially reject intellectually gifted students (Carrington, 1993).' Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre,

The writer concludes that 'this reluctance to admit to or even accept being intellectually talented casts a negative light on the label'. In the Committee's view it is essential to disconnect 'high intellectual ability' from the unwanted connotation of general moral superiority. High intellectual ability, like high sporting ability, is simply one of many morally neutral ways in which individuals can differ from each other.

> Overarching aim: to have giftedness accepted as another 'ordinary' difference.[87]

2.86 The suggestions above are speculations. Professor Start recommended research into the contradictory attitudes to different areas of behaviour.[88] The Committee agrees. To improve the schooling of gifted children, changing attitudes is crucial. Attitudes cannot be changed unless they are first understood.

Recommendation 2

MCEETYA should commission research into the reasons for negative attitudes to high intellectual ability.

Misconceptions about giftedness

2.87 Submissions reported many myths (widely-held mistaken beliefs) about gifted children. The Committee lists some here because of their close connection with negative attitudes in justifying lack of action or inappropriate action to help gifted children.

> …resistance stems from the belief that the gifted will succeed regardless …. Attitudes among the general public are very much influenced by occasional media accounts of 'wonder children', leading to a fairly stereotypical perception of gifted children.[89]

> Stereotyping of gifted students as studious and compliant has been proven to be quite unfounded.[90]

> There is a misconception that parents "hothouse" their children and teach them to read. The common belief amongst teachers and principals seems to be that once the child is away from the parent influence they will revert to "normal" children.[91]

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p.31. Carrington, N. and Bailey, S. (2000). How do preservice teachers view gifted students? Evidence from a NSW study. *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education, 9(1)*, 18-22.

87 Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, p.2

88 Submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.4

89 Submission 75, Government of Tasmania, p.2

90 Submission 110, Australian Secondary Principals' Association, p.6

91 Submission 270, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of Western Australia, p.10

> It is still common to hear myths that have no basis in fact. Below are listed those most frequently heard in Queensland in the past decade.
> • All children are gifted.
> • Identifying and catering for the potentially gifted is elitist. It is inequitable to provide extension for some.
> • Even if they are very bright, students should always stay with their chronological age peers.
> • When so-called 'gifted' children 'level out' – usually about three years into formal schooling, they will prove that strategies like acceleration impair their development, particularly social and emotional.
> • All basic low level tasks must be executed perfectly before extension can be considered and extension activities have to be undertaken out-of-class hours.
> • Children experiencing learning difficulties, low socioeconomic conditions or low literacy levels, could not be gifted.
> • Test results (eg. IQ) are probably wrong if performance is low and behaviour unsatisfactory. A child with poor motor skills and low attention to task could not be gifted.[92]
>
> 1. all children are gifted, [*All children cannot be in the top 5/3/1%*]
> 2. every child has a gift, [*All children have relative strengths not 'gifts'*]
> 3. they learn anyway, [*They do not. In fact they learn not to learn*]
> 4. optimising their education will put them at risk of social and emotional damage. [*While anecdotes about "My husband's cousin's child" abound the results of large scale quantitative evidence is to the contrary…*]
> 5. they become snobs, [*research evidence is to the contrary…*]
> 6. they cannot then fit into society [*isolation occurs because their intellect is not tapped rather than the reverse*]
> 7. gifted children are male and from upper socio-economic homes *[In fact children of high intellectual potential come from homes at every level of income, every religion, every ethnic group and there are as many girls as boys. In fact the denial of support puts the less privileged children at greater risk than the more privileged….*]
> 8. They 'burn out'. [*There is no quantitative data to support this. A very perceptive American expert commented that she had never met a 'burn out', though she had seen many who had 'never ignited'*].[93]

2.88 Submissions commented that on many counts there is convincing quantitative research that refutes popular beliefs, but it is not widely known (this relates particularly to acceleration and ability grouping, considered in chapter 3). Negative attitudes and lack of sensitisation to the issues probably contribute to the poor take-up of research findings.

> Indeed there is a wealth of research available and if education departments are not accessing this information they leave themselves open to accusations

92 Submission 31, Education Queensland, p.2

93 Submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.4

> of lack of professionalism, neglect, compromising their duty of care, and in severe cases abuse.[94]

2.89 Better teacher training to handle gifted children is essential to improve this situation. This is considered in chapter 4.

Conclusions

2.90 The Committee makes the following conclusions:

- It is necessary to disconnect opinions about what fields of endeavour are valued from the question of planning interventions. Giftedness in all valued fields of endeavour should be valued; but an appropriate focus for intervention, in light of the problems raised in this inquiry, is 'high intellectual or creative ability.' High ability in other fields such as sport, however valuable, raises different issues.
- Special needs (giftedness) should be seen in the same light as special needs (intellectual disabilities) or special needs (physical disabilities). Policy documents should make this clear.

Recommendation 3

Peak education policy documents such as the Adelaide Declaration or state/territory equivalents, where they refer to special needs or individual differences, should make it clear that 'special needs' includes giftedness.

- However, it must be stressed that this conceptual scheme is not intended to limit the reach of gifted education interventions. Interventions suitable for gifted children can benefit *all* children. This is taken up in chapter 3.
- Intellectual ability varies among individuals on a continuum. There are many moderately gifted children for each profoundly gifted. Interventions will vary according to the need. Objections to 'labelling' children are misplaced. Terms like 'moderately' or 'profoundly' gifted are not intended to be exact, but are approximations whose purpose is to guide interventions.
- Better teacher training is essential to combat negative attitudes. This is taken up in chapter 4.
- To combat negative attitudes it is most important to discard the connotation of general moral superiority which we tend to attach to 'high intelligence'. People should be encouraged to see high intellectual ability in the same light as 'high sporting ability' - a potentially valuable trait which however says nothing about the underlying moral or spiritual worth of the whole person.

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94 Submission 18, K. Fox, p.7

- The purpose of interventions for gifted children is not primarily to groom the leaders, entrepreneurs or discoverers of the next generation. The prime purpose of intervention is to respond to their special needs as children in school.
- Above all, the duty to help all children reach their potential is a moral imperative. We should not ask children to come to school to waste their time. 'Equity should be viewed as equal access to an *appropriate* education… The idea of a fully humane society is to treat all individuals and groups with concern and understanding – in other words, to be responsive to diversity.'[95]

95 C.P. Benbow & J.C. Stanley, 'Inequity in Equity': how "equity" can lead to inequity for high potential students', *Psychology, Public Policy and Law,* vol.2 no.2, 1996, p.257-8