What can we learn from gifted students and their parents? Implications for practice.

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teacher – parent –
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Image source: https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/media/6099/gifted-and-talented.jpg

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Experiences of gifted children

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What are the experiences of gifted students?

- Not appropriately challenged
- A lot of waiting
- Want to be able to learn at a faster pace
- Want to be able to learn with intellectual peers
- Feel that their teachers don't understand their abilities and only focus on their difficulties, challenges or what they can't do

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What are the learning experiences of gifted children in Western Australia in non-selective contexts?

*Scarparolo (2023)

- Qualitative, interpretative study
- Phenomenon of being intellectually gifted
- Participants
  - Purposive sampling (*n*=14)
  - Inclusion criteria (1) formal identification of being academically gifted (2) ages 5-12
  - Recruitment: Facebook parent group for WA parents of gifted children, and Gifted WA
- Data collection
  - Interviews (semi-structured)
  - Member checking
- Data analysis
  - Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022)
  - Participants chose their own pseudonyms

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Participant	Gender	Age	Twice exceptional	Parent/family word/name for gifted ability
Pikachu	M	5		Gifted
Kitty	M	6	Anxiety	Advanced brain
Percy	M	7	ADHD (H)	Multi-age brain
Tiffany	F	7		Gifted
Giraffe	F	8		Gifted
Grace	F	8		Fast brain
Sparkly unicorn	F	8		Gifted
Melody	F	8	Dyslexia	Gifted
Jackson	M	8	ADHD (I)	Multi-age brain
Polly	F	8		Gifted
Bob Sushi	M	9	Anxiety	Advanced brain
Lulu	M	10	ADHD (H)	Smart
Ella	F	11		Gifted
Jeffery	M	12		

*Participants chose their own pseudonyms

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"I want them to know that the work is too easy"

Pikachu, age 5

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"I would like them [teachers] to know that different people find different things easy and hard, and since…I finish my work really easily I think that my teachers should start realising that I am finding it easy"

Jackson, age 8

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"I don't think they do because they just give me the same work. I'd like them to know if children usually finish their work quite quickly, I think that teachers should realise that they need harder work. I find all my subjects quite easy. I finish them all in about five minutes, sometimes even two minutes"

Jackson, age 8

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"I want them to know that saying something once is a good amount. Saying something once is enough. Because loads of teachers say stuff a million times!"

Grace, age 8

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"I kind of feel like, isn't it obvious?
I have done this before; this is so easy!"

Ella, age 11

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"Happy! I would like them to know that I feel comfortable with a good challenge and that if I feel like I need help I'll still feel happy, but they should accept that I need help. They should help me"

Sparkly unicorn, age 8

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"If you give a student challenging work don't give them such challenging work that they can't do it on their own and independently without help. Otherwise, they will be sitting around for like 10-15 minutes waiting for the teacher to be finished with everyone else so then the teacher can help you"

(Percy, age 7, twice-exceptional)

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I'd feel great because I can easily finish my work but then I can help someone else with their work so that then they can get good marks as well (Percy, age 7)

Well I'd like teachers to know that…I would be happy if I could help someone else so that I can have some more people that are like me (Jackson, age 8)

I'd like more challenging work, but I also like helping my friends because if they finish then we can both do more challenging work together (Polly, age 8)

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Limitations and considerations

- All the children in the study were identified as intellectually gifted on standardised psychometric cognitive assessments (WISC-V). Therefore, children that have been identified as gifted using other means, were not included in the study. Their experiences may be different from those of the children in this study and this is worth investigating further.
- All the children in the study lived in metropolitan areas in Perth, Western Australia. Therefore, the experiences of the children in this study may not be representative of the experiences of gifted children in regional or remote areas in Western Australia and this is worth investigating further.
- The children's teachers were not interviewed; therefore, the students' experiences may not accurately reflect teachers' actions. It would be worthwhile to replicate the study and include interviews with the children's teachers. Classroom observations could also be a valuable addition.

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Summary

The gifted children in this study want their teachers to know that they want more challenging work, they want more autonomy in their learning, they want support from their teachers when they need it, and they want to work with similar-ability peers. They want their teachers to understand their abilities and specific needs as gifted learners.

Implications

- The gifted and talented policy in Western Australia could be revised to include more detail about appropriate educational provision for teachers and school leaders
- Perhaps it is time for a state inquiry into the educational provision for gifted and talented children in Western Australia to investigate educational practices and the effectiveness of these approaches.
- ACARA and SCSA should provide more information and explicit guidance for teachers and schools leaders on appropriate and evidence-based educational provision for gifted students
- More professional development opportunities for teachers

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Experiences of parents of gifted children

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What are the experiences of parents of gifted children?

- Advocacy for appropriate educational provision is a significant part of parents' experiences
- Parents report intense and unique challenges with their child's social-emotional needs, emotional intensity, sensitivity, and high levels of empathy, both at school and at home
- Parents are reported to feel frustrated, exhausted and isolated
- Parents are reported to feel that they don't know enough or don't do enough for their gifted child
- Parents are reported to perceive that teachers don't understand or have appropriate knowledge of giftedness or appropriate educational provision

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What do parents of gifted children report about their child's early years?

- Reading at a very young age
- Talking a lot, in complex sentences with a large vocabulary
- Exceptional memory
- Very curious – ask a lot of questions!
- Emotional intensity and sensitivity, and high levels of empathy

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What are the experiences of parents of gifted children in Australia? *Scarparolo (2023)

- Qualitative, interpretative study
- Phenomenon of parenting gifted children, specifically around identification and school
- Participants
  - Purposive sampling
  - Parents in Australia of intellectually gifted children (school-age)
  - Recruitment: MENSA, Gifted associations, AAEGT
  - Participants: (*n*=104)
- Data collection
  - Qualitative online survey
  - Data collection: December 2022 – January 2023
- Data analysis
  - Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

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Parent participants

	Count
New South Wales	34
Western Australia	25
Queensland	16
Victoria	16
Australian Capital Territory	6
Tasmania	4
Northern Territory	2
South Australia	1
Total	104

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Age of the parent's child	Count
4	2
5	3
6	9
7	12
8	13
9	13
10	15
11	12
12	8
13	3
14	6
15	5
16	2
17	1
18	0
Total	104

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What are the experiences of parents of gifted children in Australia? *Scarparolo (2023)

Learning and challenge

- Parents just want their children to learn and be challenged appropriately; just like non-gifted children
- Parents report that the lack of appropriate challenge impacts their child's motivation, engagement, and school attendance

Parental engagement

- Advocacy and teacher communication
- Time, effort, and persistence of parents in engaging with teachers and schools about educational provision (e.g. identification, differentiation, acceleration)
- Parent knowledge

Personal impact

- Parents (frustrated, tired, disappointed, not feeling heard, fall out from their child's school refusal and changing schools)

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Parents' experiences of the identification process

Reasons for investigation/identification

- Advocacy
- Next steps
- Paediatrician suggestion
- School suggestion
- Suspected
- Reading at 20 months
- School refusal
- Boredom and frustration at school
- A sibling had been identified
- Something 'a bit different'
- Parent gifted
- 'Just knew'
- Large vocabulary

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"**I didn't realise at first that my daughter was gifted…I thought it was normal to speak in sentences at 11 months**"

[Parent in Queensland]

"**Our son was doing things that didn't seem normal. For example, at 4 he could identify every country of the world simply by its shape**"

[Father in Western Australia, child age 6]

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"**The teacher pointed out that they don't encourage reading until teeth start falling out.**

One day, the teacher handed me a picture and told me it was my daughter's. My daughter turned around and pointed out that actually, no, hers was over there, and see? She had written her own name on it!

The teacher walked out of the room without comment"

[Parent in Victoria, child age 12]

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"**He needs to be taught. They need to be flexible in that he was doing calculus at 6 years old so doing repetition of friends of 10 way into primary school isn't going to be great.**

The only things that he loved (until this year) has been all the learning we did with him outside the classroom - a bitter pill to swallow when the $30k a year school promised they could cater for him and then refused to meet with independent Ed psychs to work out the best plan for him. Truly so disappointing"

[Parent in Queensland, child age 12]

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Consequences of identification

- Moved school
- Child thriving
- Recognition that the teacher had little power or resources to respond
- Advocacy
- No change, no response
- School refusal after no change
- Teacher ignored giftedness, focused on deficits
- Child frustrated by the teachers' responses and lack of understanding
- Didn't tell the school – feeling of why bother
- Teacher not surprised, "that explains a lot!"
- School support, open to acceleration
- Acceleration
- Learning plan
- Lack of teacher training
- Small group extension with teacher assistants

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"After giving the school the psych results (99.5th percentile) the teacher and school principal were unhappy and defensive."

[Mother in Tasmania, child age 7]

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"**Really, there was very little differentiation. In school they were learning the alphabet, outside, she was reading**"

[Parent in Tasmania, child age 4]

"**School was a disaster. Teachers failed to differentiate effectively or enough. Did not understand his poor behaviour as a source of communication about his boredom and lack of engagement but rather punished it. We have since home educated where he is thriving"**

[Parent in Queensland, child age 10]

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"**School has essentially been quite boring academically. Probably home-schooling would have best met his academic needs, but he is not an independent learner and I feel it would have strongly strained our parent-child relationship"**

[Parent in ACT, child age 14]

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"I do not think that IEPs are worth the paper they are written on. We explored public schools that said they are still on the journey for dealing with gifted kids"

[Parent in Western Australia, child age 6]

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"No teacher listened to me when I said she wanted to learn to read and do maths. They didn't take any notice of what I thought was advanced"
[Parent in Victoria about K]

"The school totally and absolutely ignored the Ed psych's report. They have done absolutely nothing for him and I am so upset"

[Parent in NSW, child age 10]

"The class teacher from the previous year said a grade skip wasn't a good idea as he wasn't the Dux of the grade the year before"

[Parent in NSW, child age 8]

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"We are currently at our third school"

[Parent in Western Australia, child age 6]

"She is about to start her fourth school"

[Parent in Queensland, age 14]

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"My child has been well supported and had a voice in the process, especially after being confirmed gifted"

[Parent in Queensland, child age 7]

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"**For me, it has depended on the school and teachers - I have had such varied experiences!**

But overarching it I think schools lack the knowledge to cater for gifted children."

[Parent in Northern Territory, child age 8]

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"Having to advocate is just ridiculous"

[Parent in Queensland, child age 9]

"**My biggest challenge in advocating for my kids has been not wanting to be 'that parent' especially since I come from a teaching background"**

[Parent in Queensland, child age 11]

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"Mixed. Roller coaster. Regrettable (I regret not advocating more intensely this year. I didn't want to be 'that parent' "

[Parent in New South Wales, child age 6]

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"**Teachers think that we as parents push our children. This misconception is frustrating"**

[Parent in Victoria, child age 9]

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“I would like teachers to know that while they might have had an easy year going through the motions for a child who made them look good, we are left to pick up the pieces of a child who was broken by the education system.

I would like them to know that parents of gifted students aren't demanding special treatment, we just want our children to have the opportunity to learn and grow, as every child should have. Gifted children shouldn't be expected to just tread water while other students catch up”

[Parent in Queensland, child age 14]

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“She would finish worksheets before the teacher finished handing them out, and was then made to sharpen pencils.

She went for most of primary without learning anything new.

She resented being made to do work that was too easy, like early readers when she was already devouring the Harry Potter series.

The first school eventually offered a once-weekly extension class but it only happened around 5 times per term and they repeated the materials the following term”

[Parent in Queensland, child age 14]

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Limitations and considerations

- Parents weren’t asked about aspects of diversity (e.g. cultural diversity, linguistic diversity, whether they are gifted or family members are gifted)
- Parents weren’t asked about aspects of diversity or additional learning needs of their child
- Parents weren’t asked about their child’s well-being, motivation, engagement, or achievement
- The study reports the subjective experiences of parents; their child’s teachers or school leaders were not given the opportunity to share their experience
- The majority of parents were mothers (*n*=103); therefore, the experiences shared may not be the same experiences as fathers of gifted children. This warrants further investigation as fathers may have different experiences.

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Implications for policy, practice and provision

1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12 and Article 29) should be the basis for the development of legislation, policy, and practice
2. Gifted education should be framed in inclusive education
3. National legislation is needed which outlines the rights of gifted students and effective provision for these students to reach their potential
4. National policies are needed which outline evidence-based practices for effective provision for academically gifted students in inclusive settings
5. Mandatory inclusion of content in initial teacher education programs
6. Legislation, policy and research should be used to inform professional learning for teachers and a nationally consistent approach to gifted education
7. Teachers need better support regarding effective provision for gifted students in inclusive contexts, including professional learning
8. Family-school partnerships: consultation and collaboration with parents and students regarding effective provision for gifted students (i.e. providing opportunities for student voice and agency regarding their education)

Next steps →Research that investigates the perspectives and experiences of teachers in Australian schools: what are their challenges and how can we support them?

Article 12 Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.

Article 29 Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full. It should encourage children to respect their parents, their cultures and other cultures.

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Image source: https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/media/6099/gifted-and-talented.jpg

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Important message: Concluding remarks

The aim and purpose of this study, the reporting of the findings and recommendations for implications is not about blaming teachers.

Often, teachers in Australia have not been given appropriate training or professional learning during teacher education or appropriate support at the school where they work and there is limited support and information available for teachers about effective evidence-based provision for gifted students by national and state curriculum authorities or in state and territory gifted and talented policies.

I hope that my two studies provide complementary information for researchers and teachers, to provide insight into two of the stakeholders' experiences with the intention of informing teacher knowledge and understanding.

It is important to also examine the perspectives and experiences of teachers in Australian schools to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

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