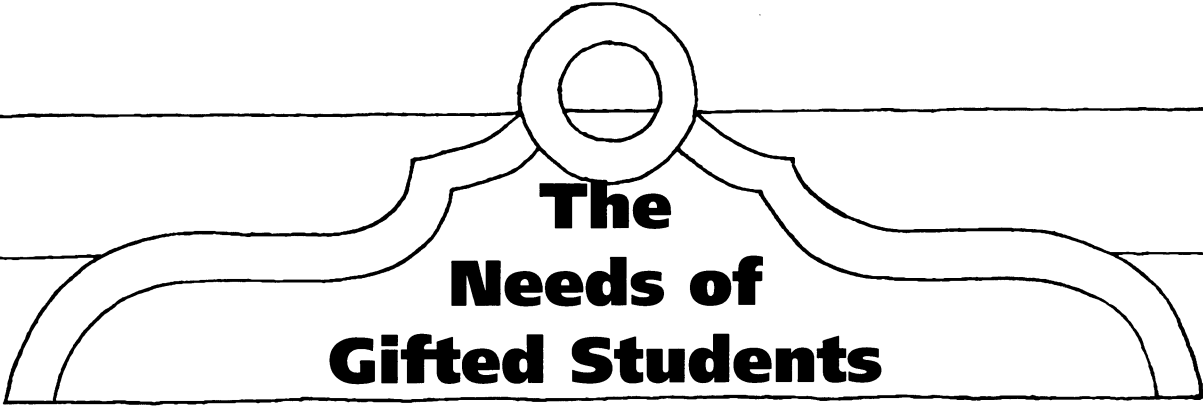




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The Needs of Gifted Students

What teachers need to know about gifted students

In catering for the needs of the gifted students within their classrooms, teachers need to be fully aware of the following well-accepted learning characteristics of these students.

They are capable of:

- comprehending information
- learning facts
- connecting concepts
- applying knowledge, and
- reasoning out underlying principles

three or so years above grade level

They learn at a much faster pace

They need only one or two exposures to new material (not the six or so the average student needs)

They need very few straight practice attempts

They require, instead, to transfer and apply new learnings and skills to varied situations

They need opportunities to create unique products and different ways of synthesising material

They enjoy pursuing topics in greater depth, breadth and complexity

They often prefer self-directed, self-paced activities, such as books and computers, rather than teacher talk

They usually like to choose their own topics and projects to explore

The majority prefer to take responsibility for their own learning.



The Needs of Gifted Students

The needs of today's young learners

The needs of gifted students, must be considered within the parameters of the current learning context for all young learners:

The home, school and church are no longer the principal sources of information for students

Students now are exposed to uncontrolled bombardment by the media

Multimedia sources result in a much higher level of stimulation

It is considered that the visual communication of modern technology favours creativity rather than attention

Today's young learners are considered, therefore, to:

- be more precocious, inquisitive and creative

- have higher levels of perception and reasoning

- have greater difficulty in focusing attention and concentrating for longer than five minute chunks

- be more easily 'bored' and less disciplined in class and at home

- have greater difficulty in expressing themselves

The memory/rote learning function of learning has been largely delegated to the computer which can be accessed rapidly for facts

It is well accepted that children adapt faster to change and modern realities than traditional under-stimulating schools

Therefore young learners:

- find class discussion based on their interests, and issues from the shows they watch, to be most meaningful

- enjoy more snappy presentations with more emotion

- due to their information overload, need the teacher's role to be filling any gaps of knowledge and providing organisation to their information

- require teachers to be facilitators, providing access to resources and responding to their questions, rather than just handing out facts and requiring them to complete routine tasks.

Desirable Outcomes for Gifted Students

Developing a range of learning styles

All students have unique preferred learning styles. Many learning styles can be categorised into pairs, in which a particular student prefers either one or the other, for example,

a visualiser	vs	a verbaliser
a global	vs	an analytical learner
competitive	vs	co-operative
impulsive	vs	reflective

In particular, gifted students are often categorised as either *convergent* (logical, sequenced, 'one right answer' learners) vs *divergent* (open-ended, intuitive, 'exploring outwards' learners) Many recent theories suggest four main learning styles, such as:

MIND

Thinkers: reflective, enjoy knowledge and facts, intellectual, logical and analytical

Learn by:
reading, researching, writing essays, working alone, memorising the content and using theories

EMOTIONS

Feelers: use emotions to learn, imaginative, sensitive, perceptive and gregarious

Learn by:
group discussions, role-play, use of fantasy, enjoy music, arts, humour, drama, movies and people - oriented subjects

SENSES

Doers: use senses and practical, linear thinking, patient, conservative, often perfectionist

Learn by:
hands-on experiences, demonstrations, field trips, results-oriented work, computers, charts, and checklists

INTUITION

Experimenters: use trial-and-error learning, impulsive, like a busy environment, inquisitive, independent

Learn by:
problem-solving experiments and open-ended activities, and enjoy games, independent study and deriving unusual solutions

Individual gifted students may prefer any one of the four styles, not just the MIND style as commonly thought. Like all students, they need classroom activities which develop their own preferred learning styles as well as assistance and encouragement to gain experience and expertise in activities favoured by other learning styles.



How Good Schools Cater for Gifted Students

A range of different provisions within the school

Good schools provide a range of different alternatives, provisions and approaches for gifted students. Some should be required of the students, such as arrangements to learn core content material at the students' appropriate pace and level, and some should be stimulating offerings for gifted students to choose from, such as lunchtime clubs.

A good school should provide the following range of options:

1. Acceleration: core content delivery at an accelerated pace either within class, in a higher class, or in an out-of-class arrangement, including advanced level courses, early VCE subjects and tertiary enrichment subjects
2. Withdrawal programs, clubs, electives, mini-courses and/or master classes - in advanced or esoteric or complex topics - either during or after class time
3. Extra subjects such as futuristics, Latin, extra VCE subjects or TAFE Business course subjects
4. Lunchtime and after-school seminars and guest speakers
5. Flexible options in the computer centre
6. Pursuit of extended or enriched projects in the library, research centre or independent learning centre
7. A rich array of team and house competitions including across sport, music, chess, debating and drama areas
8. Responsible positions in school productions - such as directing the school play, designing the school magazine, umpiring a netball team, or organising the school's SRC or the computer club
9. Opportunities for individual excellence by displaying real products and performances at a whole school and community level, such as solo instrument performances, producing the school newsletter, or designing the props for the drama performances
10. Advanced excursions and visits, such as to a particular gallery, the CSIRO or Science Works to explore complex topics or for a day's work visit
11. Whole-school activities, such as a Technology Day, Excellence Expo or Invention Convention
12. Involvement in state or nation-wide competitions and festivals such as eisteddfods, the Westpac Maths Competition, Tournament of Minds, Future Problem Solving and the Solar Car Challenge, and community projects, such as LandCare.
13. A broad range of human resources such as mentors, skilled volunteers, parents with expertise, University students or lecturers, tutors and gifted buddy systems.