

### TATE'S STORY

Tate is from a low SES community and lives in a rural setting. He has exceptional spatial skills and this allows him to creatively show his high potential in the 'design and build' arena. He is able to think and plan from several different perspectives, an advanced concept for a five year-old. As an example, Tate created a larger than life wooden block self-portrait of himself from a bird's eye point of view. He busily collected the blocks he needed and very purposefully placed them on the ground. It was soon evident that he was making a person. Tate kept working away as the teacher watched in amazement. When she thought he had finished, the teacher asked if she could take a photo of him next to his handiwork. Tate shook his head, pointed to his hair and ran off to get some shorter blocks. Once all the hair was in place, Tate placed a photo of himself next to the portrait then laid down next to it.

When a group of young children get together with construction materials there is usually much discussion, some complaining, lots of excitement and one or two grumbles. When five year-old Tate plays with construction materials none of this occurs. Tate often builds alone. He has a severe language disorder affecting his expressive, receptive and social language skills. Despite his communication difficulties, his teacher has identified that Tate has high potential in the intellectual and creative domains.

As well as being a high potential and gifted student with a disability, That in itself presents major challenges to his current and future learning. In spite of this, Tate's high potential is evident in his advanced special skills, problem solving ability and in literacy.

In many schools, Tate's high potential would not be identified or catered for. Tate's story raises several questions for schools. How effective is our school in assessing and identifying the needs of high potential and gifted students from diverse backgrounds and across **all** domains of potential? What are our school's practices, programs and procedures for providing additional challenge and extension across domains for all our high potential and gifted students?

### HOW SHOULD WE CATER FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE & GIFTED STUDENTS?

**1. We should develop our expertise in identifying them.** As Dylan Wiliam says: "In the past, the role of schools was to identify talent and let it rise to the top. The demand for skill and talent was sufficiently modest that it did not matter that potentially able kids were ignored. The demand for talent and skill is now so great, however, that schools have to be talent incubators, and even talent factories. It is not enough to identify talent in our schools any more, we have to create it"

**2. We need to provide structure and guidance** The earlier belief that gifted students do not need much structure or scaffolding in their learning has been dispelled by recent research. Instead, research indicates that gifted learners benefit from explicit teaching techniques such as worked examples, scaffolding, and well-sequenced learning tasks, especially in early stages of learning a new topic or skill. Even when completing open-ended and complex tasks, a randomised-controlled trial conducted in 2015 showed that even gifted students benefit more from external structure and guidance. Gifted students may then be able to move through earlier learning stages to guided enquiry and problem solving faster than other students.

**3. Curriculum Differentiation:** One strategy for catering for high potential and gifted students is curriculum differentiation. This occurs where teachers adapt the syllabus to meet the specific learning needs of a group of students. It may involve changes in the curriculum objectives, teaching methods, assessment methods, and/or resources and learning activities. For gifted students, curriculum differentiation strategies aim to meet their advanced learning needs by increasing the level of challenge, complexity, depth and learning pace. Forms of differentiation such as curriculum acceleration, extension and enrichment, and formative assessment-informed learning experiences have strong potential for classroom use. Positive academic

outcomes have been shown when learning experiences have been matched to the assessed advanced learning needs of gifted students.

Formative assessment and student achievement data are both important sources to inform effective differentiation. Teachers who use this information are able to strengthen differentiation practice to ensure that learning is made challenging and developmentally appropriate for gifted students, not simply different. Assessment should be used to inform differentiation as part of a dynamic process to ensure that learning extends a student's level of understanding and skill through scaffolding and extension. Use of formative assessment including strategies such as 'pre-testing' can help identify a student's the current state of mastery and learning expertise. This can help teachers use differentiation strategies such as curriculum compacting, where less time is spent on revising already-mastered content and more time is allocated to advanced learning tasks such as extension or enrichment activities.