

Improving life chances for gifted and talented students in Australian education

KEY POINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT EMERGED FROM THE SKYLINE ROUND TABLE OCTOBER 2018

BACKGROUND

Skyline Education Foundation supports gifted and academically talented students experiencing financial or social disadvantage that would affect their education outcomes in the senior years of school.

Gifted and academically talented students have great potential to be Australia's leaders and innovators, but a concerning number are under-stimulated in school and experience social isolation, according to an inquiry conducted by the Victorian Government in 2012.

As the OECD argues, improving equity in education is urgent, given the sharp increase in economic inequality in recent years and the consequences of growing economic inequality for social and educational mobility. The OECD suggests 'individual empowerment and capacity building' can alleviate the lack of social mobility. That is why Skyline provides a multifaceted 'wrap-around program' linking students with significant adults and like-minded peers as a more inclusive and empowering approach than providing finance alone.

In 2014-15, Cadence Economics calculated that new skilled graduates entering the Australian workforce grew our economic activity by \$26.4 billion (as measured by GDP) and argued that the development of our human capital is a crucial element of economic development. However, around 45,000 young Australians are currently not engaged in employment, education or training – and are unlikely to be for most of their life. Some of these young people left school early, while others failed to make a successful transition from Year 12 to further study or work. The Mitchell Institute found that the lifetime cost of one cohort of 19 year olds failing to make a successful transition is \$19 billion, and this cost is repeated every year a new cohort of 19 year olds disengages from education and employment.

Since its establishment, evaluations of the Skyline program have demonstrated its impact on the education and career pathways of highly able disadvantaged young people who are at risk of not realising their potential. Skyline has supported over 300 students since 2006, and now partners with 25 schools. The achievements are significant:

- up to 65% of Skyline students achieve higher VCE results than they aspired to before joining the program
- 100% have successful post school outcomes: 85% of Skyline students enter university; by 2018 seven students had entered vocational education and training, with others proceeding directly to work
- more than 70% of Skyline students take on leadership roles within their school or are recognised for academic excellence, becoming role models for their siblings and peers.
- More than a quarter of Skyline alumni have gone on to further study such as Masters and Doctoral degrees.

With Skyline's active encouragement, support and advocacy, by far the most significant difference that Skyline students see in themselves is increased confidence and self-efficacy – personal traits that translate to longer-term personal, societal and economic benefits. As they leave school, students say they now:

- see themselves as a person of value and worth
- have confidence in their academic ability and capacity to succeed
- are better able to define and pursue a career pathway of their choice
- have stronger personal, organisational and work-readiness skills
- have increased motivation and capacity to give back to their community through leadership and volunteer work.

To date Skyline has worked with the tip of the iceberg, and the October Round Table discussed a range of issues and how they could be addressed to achieve greater impact.

DEVELOPING THE NARRATIVE

Terms relating to gifted and talented, high potential learners are poorly understood or contentious.

Action

- Skyline will continue to work with education leaders, teachers and the wider community to create a more powerful narrative around gifted and academically talented students, encompassing concepts like equity, agency, social mobility, disadvantage and differentiation.

IDENTIFICATION

Support for educators in the early identification of gifted and academically talented students is important

Action

- Pre service teaching courses should spend more time on identification and addressing gifted and academically talented students as part of differentiation
- Teachers in schools like The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School and John Monash Science School could mentor Skyline companion teachers
- Easy to use school based tools and guidelines for identification of gifted and talented from the full range of students should be validated and accessible

DIMENSIONS OF DISADVANTAGE

Disadvantage can be associated with economic circumstances, and also with other dimensions such as rural and remote locations; immigrant status; family isolation and health

Action

- Identify sources of support for program development (eg Victorian schools are funded for 'equity and excellence' and could purchase programs for rural and remote students)
- Skyline could create a network of educators in conjunction with others to raise awareness and develop strategies for improvement

DIFFERENTIATION

Gifted and academically talented students are likely to learn differently from other students, so differentiation of curriculum and learning activities is often required

Action

- Skyline could support educators to identify flexible school structures and teaching and learning strategies to better engage the full range of gifted and academically talented learners
- Skyline will explore further opportunities for flexibility in the program

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Gifted students often feel isolated, especially in non-selective schools where they might be in a small minority

Action

- Skyline will select at least two students per school and continue to provide a wrap-around experience with like-minded peers
- Skyline will build on the power of the 'camp effect' to address isolation

NEXT STEPS

A second Round Table will be facilitated by Dr Dahle Suggett on 10 April, 2019 from 1 – 4 pm in a city venue.

FOCUS: BUILDING COLLECTIVE IMPACT

The common goal for organisations and individuals around the table is to address the inescapable link between social and economic inequity and educational outcomes. Skyline's focus is gifted and academically talented senior students at serious risk of not achieving their potential; others are concerned with early and middle years, specific geographic areas, low achievers and so on. Together we can create synergies to change personal circumstances as well as structural barriers

AIMS OF THE ROUND TABLE

- to work on the narrative and produce a statement for joint publication
- to map the cohorts we all work with and identify linkages, relationships and new ways of working
- to share the evidence base and plan greater dissemination

To express interest in attending, please contact
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READINGS

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Munro, J. (2019). How to identify, understand and teach gifted children.
<https://theconversation.com/how-to-identify-understand-and-teach-gifted-children-107718> OECD. (2018).

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*Participants in the October Round Table included Skyline Board members, staff and

- Professor Kwong Lee Dow AO, Patron, Skyline
- Chris Wardlaw PSM, Chair, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
- Dr Toni Meath, Principal, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
- Debbie Locco, Executive Director, South Eastern Region, DET
- Megan O'Connell, Director, The Mitchell Institute
- Jenny Walsh, Vice President, Global Schools, Pearson
- Susannah Schoeffel, Social Ventures Australia
- Ian Phillips, evaluator, I&J Phillips
- Ruth Moore, Skyline Alumna