

reviews

Finding the way home

Children's Welfare Association of Victoria

Video (17 minutes), 2001

Finding the Way Home is an entertaining and informative introduction to foster care in country Victoria. In this short documentary we enter the homes of three foster carers and see how ordinary Australians can provide a loving and secure environment for troubled children who are unable to remain at home.

Produced by the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria, and made possible by grants from The Ian Potter Foundation and the R.E Ross Trust, the video presents the foster care experience from the carer's perspective. The carers talk about what they are doing whilst going about their day to day activities. It is clear that all of them see fostering simply as an extension of their ordinary lives.

The first couple, Niall and Georgina, are retirees with no children of their own. They have embraced the notion of an 'extended family', and knew their farm would be an ideal haven for children but weren't sure if they were up to it. The biggest surprise has been their enjoyment from having young people about – 'Nobody told us kids were such fun.'

Not every rural carer can offer paddock bombs, fishing holes and acres of bush for kids to roam, certainly not the single mother of four living in a regional town. She admits to financial and emotional struggles but with the support of her family, friends and the local indigenous family reunification organisation, she has developed the confidence and self-esteem to cope with the needs of children damaged by traumatic upbringings. 'You can never know enough', she says, but the rewards are obvious: 'these kids have so much to offer.'

A couple with three children of their own refer to their bush-block as a sanctuary. It's hard to disagree as the kids pan for gold and shoot pool in the shed. Conversation covers issues important to all potential carers, such as the difficulties of accepting strangers into your home, individual preferences, family safety and financial remuneration. For one daughter these aren't as important as the number of friends foster care provides. She sometimes thinks her family incomplete without

'cousins' staying over. Her parents see nothing special in what they do and say they learn just as much as the kids.

The tales of these carers are balanced by the story of a young man who has grown up in foster care. Robbie discusses the difference his foster family made to his life and the feelings of belonging and love that he discovered.

Finding the Way Home covers many universal issues in relation to fostering. The central theme of community will resonate strongly with those who see fostering as a way of giving something back to society. Foster carers are as diverse a group of people as any in society, and it would be impossible to identify three carers who absolutely typify the role and the important work they undertake. In fact, if it were, we would also have to categorise the children who need care in watertight boxes. Potential foster carers may identify with the lives and concerns of at least one of the families depicted. More importantly, they might realise that homeless children are not confined to the metropolitan area and that there are kids in their district who desperately need a home, however temporary.

As the credits roll you reflect on the compassionate nature of carers, the urgent needs of hundreds of country children and the feeling that maybe you too can be doing a bit more.

Victorian foster care programs (rural and metropolitan) are using the video as a recruitment and training resource with positive results. Feedback received at CWAV has confirmed the judgment that the best people to promote foster care are those who are doing it now, and this is the great strength of the video.

Reviewed by:

Jennifer and John Donohue
with added comments from out-of-home care organisations represented at a May, 2001 workshop held at CWAV.

Available from CWAV, tel: 03 9614 1577, fax: 03 9614 1774
(\$60 / \$40 CWAV members)

Gifted young children: A guide for teachers and parents

Louise Porter

Allen & Unwin, Australia, 1999

Special provision for gifted children in the context of the education system is subject to considerable debate. Louise Porter's *Gifted Young Children - A guide for teachers and parents* provides an outline and analysis of the debate and

offers practical advice for the identification and education of children of advanced intellectual ability.

In this text, Porter includes the position of detractors, who speculate over notions of democracy (segregated programs

bestow extra privileges on children who are already advantaged), economics (the particular needs of gifted children are secondary to children with learning difficulties) and cohesion (it is argued that removing gifted children from the mainstream setting is disruptive to the school community).

Moreover, Porter describes a division of principle amongst advocates of gifted education in terms of the underlying rationale for providing special education for gifted children. One paradigm suggests that gifted children have the basic democratic right to be provided with the opportunity to realise their full intellectual potential. The other considers the future contribution of gifted children to society as the motivation for special investment in their intellectual development.

In *Gifted Young Children*, Porter highlights the importance of identifying gifted children as early as the preschool years, claiming that early detection may have a significant impact on the development of the gifted child. Her rationale for early detection is accompanied by strategies for identifying giftedness and managing the complex social and emotional issues that are typically associated with giftedness in young children. By focussing on these issues at an early age, it is suggested that some of the more negative factors related to giftedness may be circumvented, facilitating children with advanced learning ability to reach their full potential.

Porter's main contention in *Gifted Young Children* is that we should focus our efforts on improving mainstream settings to provide for the individual needs of all children, including the gifted. She advocates an individualised model of education, in which all children are exposed to open-ended activities in a wide range of content domains. This allows children of all abilities to engage with the curriculum at their own level, and for subsequent programming to nurture and extend emerging talent.

Porter analyses the implications for the educational environment of advanced learners, in relation to curriculum, teaching methods and the physical and social characteristics of the learning milieu. She discusses the effects of acceleration, including the social and intellectual benefits of early school entry for advanced learners.

The author also considers family adjustment, support and counselling for both children and parents. She advocates the empowerment of parents to support and encourage the holistic development of their children within the family unit, and for parents and educators to work together in meeting the needs of the gifted child. The final chapter offers practical advice on formulating a policy and guidelines for advanced learning.

Gifted Young Children provides a balanced insight into the varying attitudes to education for gifted children. It also highlights the difficulty of defining giftedness, which diverges across time and culture and which is subject to political and psychological factors. Despite this, Porter utilises the various concepts as a basis for informing her own views of giftedness and assessing the most practical and appropriate ways to address and foster it within the education system.

TARGET AUDIENCE

As the title suggests, this book is targeted at teachers and parents of gifted young children. Any parent, childcare

professional, teacher or student having an interest in the topic will gain valuable information from this book, not only in relation to gifted children, but on the development of children with all abilities from very early childhood and beyond their entry into the formal education environment.

AUTHOR

Louise Porter lectures in the School of Special Education and Disability Studies at Flinders University in South Australia and is the author of *Young Children's Behaviour* and *Student Behaviour*. She is a child and clinical psychologist with teacher training and a Masters degree in gifted education as well as many years' experience working with children.

STRUCTURE

The book consists of fourteen chapters, with each divided into an overview of the key points, introduction, logically sequenced information and material under headings that enhance readability and continuity. Each chapter concludes with a summary, list of further reading and several thought-provoking discussion questions. These help to refocus on the major points and encourage individual evaluation of the material, whilst providing an opportunity for readers to relate the material to their own sphere of interest or area of practice. The discussion questions provide a useful tool for educators and students. A rich array of references cited in each chapter reinforces her arguments, also providing the reader with access to aspects of the subject for further exploration.

The main body of the book provides highly relevant and logically sequenced information for both parents and early childhood professionals.

CONCLUSION

Gifted Young Children is a valuable tool for educators and education students as well as a comprehensive guide for teachers, childcare professionals and parents of young children. It is written in an easily accessible style that is relevant for both professional and lay readers.

The text summarizes present literature and research on differing aspects of the topic. It identifies limitations and gaps and suggests innovative models for practice based on the broad knowledge and experience of the author.

Gifted Young Children provides a wealth of information and practical suggestions to enhance the identification of children who are gifted in a variety of spheres, to understand their needs and encourage their holistic development.

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