

# **Attitudes of Preservice Teachers Towards Gifted Students**

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*I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.*

*I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.*

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Neil Carrington

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## ABSTRACT

This study obtained new empirical evidence on preservice teacher attitudes towards gifted students and identified some possible influences on these attitudes. Preservice teacher attitudes towards two types of school student, one gifted and the other average, were compared. In addition, an examination was made as to whether attitudes to each type of student were affected by ability characteristics or by certain other personal attributes, namely academic effort in school and gender. Taking into account this three way interaction of ability, gender and effort and by also considering the gender of the preservice teachers, the university they attended and their year of study, a series of four way analyses of variance was carried out to quantify the significance of results. One thousand four-hundred and seventy preservice teachers were surveyed. This group was made up of 942 primary preservice teachers and 528 secondary preservice teachers from the University of New England, Charles Sturt University, the University of Newcastle, the University of New South Wales and the University of Wollongong.

Based on the results of this study, it appears that the primary preservice teacher generally considered the average student more desirable, with a clear preference for students not too studious. While the gender of the student was not seen as important, the gender of the preservice teacher was significant. The university the preservice teacher attended was also a significant variable but the year of study appeared to make little difference to primary preservice teacher attitudes. The average student who was not too diligent was the ideal in the eyes of primary preservice teachers. At the other end of the attitude spectrum was the hard working gifted student.

Secondary preservice teachers appeared to prefer those who did not apply themselves too diligently. Whether students were gifted or average appeared to matter little to secondary preservice teachers, as did the gender of the student. The gender of the secondary preservice teacher did, however, have an effect on the attitudes they held, as did the university the secondary preservice teachers were attending. The year of study secondary preservice teachers were in appeared to have little effect.

The gifted were not simply less desirable because of their intellectual ability. The rejection seemed to result from an interaction with traits that were not acceptable to preservice teachers. All preservice teachers placed a high value on nonstudiousness. The nonstudious were, in the main, seen as more desirable by most respondents. It is noteworthy that the gifted-studious female was at the bottom of both the primary and the secondary scale. A gifted-female's desirability fluctuated enormously according to her application to study.

Those concerned with the educational climate in schools should note that the results of this study challenge some of the popular notions about the valuing of application to study. Those who believe that preservice teachers would prefer the studious student will find little evidence to support such a point of view. Those who feel students who are gifted would be held in high esteem by our future educators may need to re-examine their thinking, as will those who believe that gender itself plays a large part in determining how students are viewed. This study draws the conclusion that being gifted and striving towards academic success at school do not appear to elicit the support one would imagine from our future classroom teachers. The findings of this study must be considered by policy makers if the educational needs of children are to be met and all students are to have the opportunity to realise their full potential.