Education and Training Committee

Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students

Parliament of Victoria

Spring St

East Melbourne, 3002

From

WiseOnes® Australia Pty Ltd

A provider of services to schools and families in support of the gifted from age 6 to 14.

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1. Gifted education is not more of the same. It is different
2. Schools are not providing high enough difference in several areas.
3. Teachers have severe lack of knowledge about giftedness and teaching the gifted. It is not compulsory in their degree and some are not capable of it.
4. Parents know nothing of government policies. They trust the schools.
5. Schools that think they do enough, do not, judging by our emails.
6. Parents are very positive about WiseOnes because it makes their child happy, interested in learning and have the small groups of like minds to share ideas. The chance of the school accepting the idea is only about 30%
7. Most schools reject the idea of an outside professional assisting them in gifted education but they still call a plumber for the taps.
8. The stress of running their own program is extra and too much for many so the fact that WiseOnes manages everything is a great help.
9. The major problem is the cost of the unusual curriculum and high quality teachers and resources and the small group size. The lesson and resources are not “off-the-shelf” but created by specialist gifted educationists.
10. Parents can’t see why 2SD slow learners are funded but not the 2SD gifted. They want WiseOnes but not the cost even though they also pay for music, sport, martial arts, overseas holidays (some). No poor school, under 1000 on the index, has been able to sustain the program even at half price. This is not equity of access for these gifted human beings on the lowest rungs of our supposedly egalitarian society, and WiseOnes can make much more difference for them to rise out of poverty and poor environment than for those in the top half of society. See the Principal’s comments some pages down. Once I, Founder of WiseOnes, was one of those terribly poor children with brains. One teacher had mercy on me, a Mary Mackillop nun, and got me tested for free, coached me after school for a scholarship and my parents went without food to pay my train fare to a city school on a scholarship, after missing year 6 and 7 altogether. I really care about those poor children and I think you should too. It would save a lot of unemployment and health money in the long run.

Attachments in support of the submission.

1. Parent responses to our survey- Excel spreadsheet
2. Parent responses about benefits they see in the WiseOnes program
4. International Gifted blogs
5. Teacher change and resistance article
6. Principals brochure re leadership in gifted education in the school.
7. Six types of giftedness by Prof Maureen Neihart 2010
8. Copies of all the parent survey forms are available on request.
WiseOnes is an holistic educational program for very fast learners that is delivered in schools. It helps those assessed as significantly different to be happier and more challenged to have a go at reaching their full potential. There are many more of these children than most people think. There are six types and some are not literate, some have behavior problems, some seem immature, some hide to fit it, some make deliberate errors, some are teacher pleasers so don’t take any risks, many lack confidence in themselves as they find it difficult to find who they are and how society works when they don’t work that way. Only testing by a teacher who knows about giftedness finds them. WiseOnes does this free for the schools who want the program. Not all of the gifted have expressed this potential in a way that is recognizably gifted but the assessment has found the potential. A free standardized test is available to parents online but a government recognized test is used for entry to school WiseOnes programs.

WiseOnes teachers help the whole child as our teachers are gifted themselves and have the similar senses of humour, empathy for others, principled worldview, quirky look at life and see so many more connections between ideas. Our teachers love learning, passionately. See how important the quality of the teacher is by reading the testimonials.

WiseOnes provides a support service, in your primary school and in school time. There is no travel or risk involved. Children do not miss the same class lesson every week unless the school plans it that way. WiseOnes works for and with your school to bring you an extra opportunity. Out of school programs are for secondary gifted students and we have special needs in literacy for students or adults or concentrated employment learning for the most needy, i.e. migrants unused to our customs and non readers.

Our qualified, registered, experienced and happy teachers attend the school weekly to deliver special needs, specifically designed curriculum for these children.

Schools, recognizing the needs, contract the WiseOnes Education Manager in their area to provide the extra support program. Unfortunately it is not government funded so most parents pay a fee. Community sponsorship program materials can be obtained from WiseOnes if parents want local sponsors for their local school program. Usually the response is good.

It is a very different curriculum, with resources from all over the world, and the fast learners have fun learning it in their small group of 8 like minds. The AIMS are academic, intellectual, moral and social development for the child so that cleverness moves towards wisdom. We believe that wisdom is when you live in integrity and are deeply happy even when things are a bit tough.
WiseOnes wholistic curriculum is not connected to state or national outcomes as these children need different, faster, more complex and more principled and abstract learning experiences and a different style of teaching too. They cover the state and national requirements with their class teacher.

Please view the Testimonials to read parent, teacher and student comments about the WiseOnes program.

**Parent Comments** on Benefits Qn 5  Survey May 2011.

*Many older testimonials may be read online at www.wiseones.com.au*

- We changed schools when we moved house over a year ago and the WiseOnes program was an important part of our decision-making process. Both my children have gained knowledge through the WiseOnes program but more importantly it has given my son real challenges and has given my daughter the comfort that she's not the only one who's "different". Sometimes going to WiseOnes is the only thing that gets her through the school week, as feeling "different" can be completely overwhelming for a 7 year old. Mt Pleasant school parent.

- Claudine's caring but firm approach to their extended learning reassures me that this is money well spent. My children are excited when WiseOnes day comes around and can't wait to talk about what they've learned when they come home. Claudine reminds them that all children have different strengths and she helps each child work to those strengths with loads of encouragement and careful assessment of their abilities. With the current constraints on the public education system, I see WiseOnes as a window of opportunity to help my children fulfil their potential.' Dingley P.S parent

- The WiseOnes program has helped my child feel that he fits in into the normal school. Mill Park PS

- My oldest child participated in 3 WiseOnes programs and really enjoyed working in a fast paced environment where she felt very supported by the teacher. Boronia Heights PS parent

- WiseOnes is supporting her confidence and assisting her to accept less than perfection( it will be a long process) Malvern PS parent

- WiseOnes has been fantastic for my daughter’s self esteem and something she looks forward to every week. It helps keep her motivated to attend school.(The school had suggested that this child was slow as she did not interact in class and refused to communicate with the teacher. She was discriminated against because of a congenital condition but now she is up near the top of the class thanks to the increased self esteem Ed) school name withheld

- My daughter would rather go to WiseOnes than stay in her class. She loves WiseOnes. Livingstone PS

- My child is enjoying it immensely. It has also given him a boost in his confidence. Mill Park PS

- WiseOnes has given her exposure to information and concepts outside the normal curriculum. This broader view of the world around her turns up in her conversation and hopefully brings forward and widens her career choices. Donvale PS parent

- I know my daughter is very enthusiastic with WiseOnes lessons. school not known, parent

- WiseOne has helped her accept who she is and that there are many children that learn in the same manner that she does. It has given her something exciting to look forward to each week and is developing her confidence , sense of belonging and enjoyment. Taylors Lakes area parent

- My son loved WiseOnes . He was happy with the extra learning and benefited from the interaction with other engaged children. Dandenong ranges area parent.

- Absolutely loves WiseOnes and is thriving in the program. I am yet to tie her progress in WiseOnes to main stream academic work that she does in her normal classroom. Dingley PS parent

- He has been able to tap into experiences and increase his knowledge base that eh otherwise would not have had through normal school curriculum. It has helped with working in small groups. Malvern PS parent

- This only my child's second term but I am satisfied now that she is challenged and with the knowledge she has explored.

- My child’s self confidence has increased. Dingley PS parent
The WiseOnes program has provided my children with new avenues of challenges, and opportunities to explore their creativity further. Doncaster PS parent

WiseOnes has provided my children with a different perspective and topics than the normal classroom process. It also means that they are more likely to be challenged and respond positively in a safe environment and learn to deal with being wrong without the pressure of the normal classroom dynamics (i.e. tormenting) - school unnamed but phone provided.

My son has just started his second program titled Forensic Science. He is quite interested in this topic and appears to have a much more positive attitude. Keilor PS

More confidence. Learned to empower herself. Provides positive stimulation and interest in more challenging areas so not “lost” in the system. Good to know the characteristics of gifted children - i.e. frustration, drama queen, and therefore positively direct with guidance, understanding and nurturing young minds. Thanks for opportunity to support and nurture these children. Dingley PS

Very positive for him. He loves it. Concern is communication between WiseOnes and class teacher at school. Why not? Feedback not given to teacher who “knows nothing about the program” Malvern PS

My child looks forward to attending WiseOnes each week. His face light up as he tells me about what he has learnt. WiseOnes has increased his self confidence and self esteem. Blackburn Lake PS

They both look forward to the class which is the first good thing. It’s not so much about the subject itself, although it’s wonderful to open their eyes to things they may not otherwise learn about, but more the “thought process”. WiseOnes teaches children HOW to think outside the box and work out a solution for themselves. They will learn to question things automatically, without even trying to. My son wants to take everything apart and find out HOW. My daughter questions everything to find out WHY. This program is perfect for both of them.

My child finds it interesting taking this extra class.

He has enjoyed learning new things. It has broadened his knowledge base and he is very interested in it.

First child - He enjoyed quieter classroom and kids who wanted to learn and the faster pace. 2nd child-enjoys quieter learning environment, “interesting” work, faster pace. Seems confident now with her abilities.

It seems to be giving her and us, as her parents, greater confidence. However we do wonder if 1 hour a week is enough.

WiseOnes has made her more confident as a child and more mature. Thank you very much.

There is nothing at my son’s school. The Principal said he overestimates himself. Luckily he did the WiseOnes test at home so we know that is not the case. He finds school learning boring.

Our country primary school did not provide any help for any of our children. The first and third were identified by a WiseOnes test, the second at his secondary entry test and the fourth is still unidentified officially even though he is 18 months younger, at or near the top of his Year 9 class and a huge reader. No-one knows that he a very deep thinker or that he is so young, because he is tall and sporty. The only special help was for the first who was handed a saxophone and a book and taught herself. She already knew keyboard. The new college music teacher drove her 400km each way to Melbourne to practice in the Australian Youth Band and she played at the 2008 Olympic Games. One caring teacher really matters.

SUMMARY

Early identification benefits the child. This must be individual by a trained gifted specialist. The Ravens Colored Matrices works well as an identifier. It must be done late in Prep year, not before August, due to brain development at that age.

Many gifted children find school boring and underachieve to fit in. Poor or “immature” behaviours are not what they seem. They are indicators of a need not met in a young child. Poor academic performers and those with poor behaviour must have access to the gifted program if they qualify in thinking and reasoning and problem solving. It is very difficult to identify the gifted unless you test and then only with some tests, not all. Test score variance is greater in the gifted. Performance is not as significant as potential.

Teachers of special gifted groups must be gifted themselves and have Professional development in Giftedness and in teaching the gifted. They must also have a keen and subtle sense of humour, be happy people due to the gifted ability to feel the pain of others,
and live a wise lifestyle (no smoking, low or no alcohol intake, no or very few points on driver’s licence) with the ability to allow the children to talk to their parents about values and beliefs without any brainwashing or hot fashion ideas in education. They must trust parents.

- **Empathy is required** for the problems/challenges of the gifted- lack of confidence due to their significant difference from others, lack of literacy in some, extreme sense of justice and unfairness in community leading to constant anguish, extra speed of learning so class is too slow, class programs are too narrow in focus, lack of opportunity to discuss the higher principles in class as others are bored or maybe even the teacher can’t do it, loss of enthusiasm for learning due to requirements of a restricted and slow curriculum.

- **Lack of enough hands on work** for the kinaesthetic gifted learners and lack of visuals for the non auditory learners. Still too much chalk and talk in class.

- **Lack of opportunity to discuss ideas at length and in depth** without being tested or marked. Others get bored with gifted level talk.

- **Non discipline atmosphere** – there should be no criticism in a gifted class, everything is educational. Ordinary classes have constant discipline of others so that the gifted suffer emotionally due to their extreme empathy and ability to pick up nuances of the teacher’s feelings. The discipline problem is much worse the further you get from the more affluent suburbs, so that some gifted children actually get sick from going to school. Teachers with relationship, ethical or health problems are not appropriate for some of these super sensitive children. Who is going to notice this and make the necessary changes? Small groups are necessary. WiseOnes has found 10 in a group to be too many and 5 not enough.

- **Unsuitable teaching and learning style for the gifted**- they want wholistic, global, principled and up to date learning, delivered fast and with the complexities still in it. They like the “plunge in and have a go” style of learning, not step by step. They are ahead of many ordinary class teachers in their scientific knowledge and get the message straight away without needing repetition. They lose respect for the teacher who gives them what they know is out of date information. It is not true that a good ordinary teacher can teach the gifted appropriately.

- **Handwriting is very boring for many gifted and too slow for their flow of ideas**- this can lead to omission of words or phrases, reversals of letters. There needs to be a balance of essential writing and discussion and argument. What writing has to be done must be interesting, creative or for direct teaching technicalities. Those gifted who do beautiful work with extreme care are underachieving or are unable to judge what their time is worth, They may have early Obsessive Compulsive Disorder which is more common in the gifted. They have substituted aesthetics or teacher pleasing for depth of content. The teacher of the gifted helps them assess this and make adjustments in a way that reaches a happy outcome.

- **Childrens’ comments.**
  - I like it because of the experiments we do and I enjoy it.
  - We do lots of fun things like making challenges and lots more. We are always having fun. It is never boring.
  - Every week there’s always something exciting and challenging. It’s always fun and never boring. If I had to choose between class and WiseOnes I would choose WiseOnes. I love WiseOnes.
  - We do better stuff like electricity. It’s fun because we learn a lot and you get to experiment with different things.
  - I like WiseOnes. At the moment we are learning about shells.
  - It is fun and educational. You learn more than during school /it’s more hands on.
  - I come to WiseOnes because I am interested in learning about things not so many people know.
• I like WiseOnes because it’s hands on, fun and it is educational. It is also good being in small group.
• I enjoy WiseOnes because it gives me a chance to do things I wouldn’t usually do in school. You also get to meet other people you wouldn’t usually talk to.
• There are too many people in the class to do the kind of things we do in WiseOnes.
• I enjoy WiseOnes a lot because I learn lots of new things that I wouldn’t really learn during school classes. I think it’s interesting and complicated but it’s really fun. I’d like to keep on doing WiseOnes until I leave school.
• I enjoy WiseOnes because I have a small group and lots of friends and I’m learning lots of interesting stuff and I’m really enjoying WiseOnes and I want to keep on doing it.
• I think WiseOnes is great because I am challenged to do things that I thought I could never do. Also all the things we do are so interesting, different and fun.

Unique Programs offered by WiseOnes

All WiseOnes units are designed to benefit the academic, intellectual, moral, social, emotional and spiritual development of the gifted child who is significantly different from the average child of the same age. The child and his/her specific needs is the focus, not the curriculum or the processes. No unit is repeated in a seven year cycle at the same school and units are updated with new research. 2011 is WiseOnes 14th year providing these programs. WiseOnes has an exclusive licence to provide these units for gifted children. They are unique and the intellectual property of the owner. Every teacher signs a Confidentiality Agreement. Skills in English and Mathematics are taught as needed in these topics on an individual basis.

The teacher is a major part of the curriculum, more important than resources, references or teaching aids, activities, specially created videos, processes, products or principles, that are provided by WiseOnes as part of each unit. Each teacher has to learn the content of a new curriculum topic each term and at an adult gifted level, since a few primary children in WiseOnes programs have had mental ages over 25 years as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, a standardized test. Many have a mental age of 17 years. This extremely advanced general knowledge sets them apart in every way from average children. The extra connections they make every second increase the difference so they become more and more different and more and more lonely. The research shows the average increase is 140% per year and they already know 80% of the years work the first week of the year. They cannot learn class lessons the same way as others. The life wisdom of the teachers is the best quality of the WiseOnes program and great care is taken in selecting them. They are all constant learners themselves.

We suspect that cutting and anorexia and graffiti are ways of self or community harm exercised by the unbalanced gifted when they do not have appropriate support. Most people do not realize that their extra sensitivities means that violence and suffering and disasters have much more effect on them and it is as if they were personally part of it. Bullying has more effect and can lead to suicide. Schools need to be very careful about what is being taught by teachers in different subject of secondary school so that all the bad news is not taught at once. WiseOnes has experience of counseling children who have been emotionally distraught by the schools combinations and considered suicide. It seems to be bad news world with media and some teachers frightening the young people, so they lose hope of any future and try to drown their unhappiness in drink or drugs. WiseOnes always offers hope and positive ways people make the world better.

The pain is real pain, not just talk, and mostly can be avoided by helping them to understand what being gifted means- ODD, UNUSUAL, OUT OF THE NORMAL RANGE, LONELY, NOT LIKE MOST OTHERS, OVER-PERFECTIONIST, OVER-JUDGMENTAL, FAST, COMPLEX,
yet there are a few of us here. Prof Miraca M Gross recognizes this in her work, calling it a forced choice dilemma- to be yourself and lonely or act dumb and be accepted. If you act always you lose your own self, your identity. You are lost to yourself. WiseOnes teachers help you find your real self.

The gifted can accept the way they are if they know about it and take measures to help themselves such as going out of the room or not going to drug parties or violent movies. One dose of drugs can send a gifted person into Bipolar disease. Wrong diet can make them lethargic, overweight and dull. Medicines can have bad effects on them. They have so many sensitivities to foods.

Prof/Dr Linda Silverman says the research shows the BIG 4 are --wheat, cow’s milk, oranges and chocolate. Imagine a gifted child has weetbix and milk with a glass of orange juice for breakfast and a choc biscuit for morning recess. Parents and the school think that is good. How can that child achieve his/her potential? They are drowsy as their immune system tries to cope. Also electronic radiation is damaging to their sensitive systems. Some devices use wave lengths that are very close to the normal human brain wave activity and this cannot be good for the gifted. Some have a 500 metre range and wifi at our office has a 50 metre range. We have a gadget for counteracting this attached to our mobile phones and the water supply as well as another to counteract the earth energy line that goes through our property. We can’t sleep near the front as the power pole at our driveway gives out huge radiation now it is loaded with lines.

So what does the WiseOnes program do? You can tell from the testimonials .

WiseOnes enables young gifted people to become happier and wiser.

Who can enter the programs or what do you mean by gifted?

- Score in the top 10% of the particular school. (Prof Francois Gagne) This actual level is higher in high socio-economic areas and lower in some rural or outer urban areas. Prof Miraca Gross helped us in making this decision as in some schools there were no children able to score above the 90% percentile even though they appeared to be gifted. Since then those children have had ENTER scores for university over 95 so she was correct. In practice about 5% enroll as schools charge a levy for programs and this is a serious concern.
- Have scored an HD on a UNSW test.
- Have a psychologist’s test showing average IQ over 125 with some scores over 130.
- Can read at level 23 or more at the end of Prep year.
- Have very strong teacher or parent evidence of potential that counteracts a lower score.
- WiseOnes takes all children with scores at 95th percentile, the gap around a 93rd percentile in most schools and the 90th percentile in low scoring schools. The final decision is made by the school leaders based on the scores recorded and presented to them.
- Disabilities such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, aggression are not barriers to entry.

In Summary

1. Teachers of the gifted must be *gifted themselves* - Dr Susan Nikakis. It takes a complex brain to teach a complex brain no matter how non PC this is. Complex brains can understand simple brains but simple brains cannot understand complex brains.
2. Teachers of the gifted need to be *highly empathetic and principled* people because this is how the gifted children are- judgmental. Loneliness and misunderstanding are part of the daily life of
the gifted. The further from the city, the lower your social status the worse it is. Prof Miraca M Gross calls it a forced choice dilemma—wear a mask of ordinariness and lose your true identity or accept being bullied, ignored, insulted, lonely, bored and despairing of social life ever suiting you.

3. A bureaucratic, rigid curriculum does not suit many gifted students who need variety, depth—the WHAT ELSE of it, up to date science—the HOW and WHY NOT of it, understanding historical links to today’s world—the WHY of it. The people or communities involved—the WHO of it, the future prospects of the idea—the WHAT POSSIBILITIES of it, the counter arguments against it—the FASHION and POLITICS of it. Most of all it is real fun for them to learn their way at their level so WiseOnes is FUN.

4. TALKING and MOVING must be part of it for the kinaesthetic learners—being still cuts off their thinking and the sparking of new ideas/links in their neurological network. Many of the previously unidentified are kinaesthetic learners and have trouble thinking when told to sit down and stop talking. We note that many teachers are auditory processors but only 20% of the class is like that so talking to them is not the most efficient way of getting the message accepted.

5. Acceptance that each individual is different and that this is RIGHT not wrong for the benefit of the human race and the world itself. That means every human is respected, not criticized or condemned. We need to ask WHY do you think that way? What is your evidence? How did you come to feel that way? Our rules are ….. We have agreed to them so we need you to go, until you can cope with that which allows us to achieve the purpose for which we are all here. Come back when you are ready—positive discipline leaving self control to the person involved. Autonomy is important to them.

Community attitudes

1. You can be as gifted at sport as you like but just don’t do it with thinking. Great football coaches are gifted in intellect as well as in sport. Somehow people forget that—think Mick Malthouse and James Hird. You can’t win at elite level without a complex brain.

2. People are scared that you might manipulate them and they would not notice it. They do not understand the greater presence of principled behavior in most gifted people. In fact many average teachers do not know what a principle actually is.

3. Teachers as a whole are lacking in self esteem. Many feel threatened by the idea of mental power and many are nowhere near able to understand it. The post WW2 shortage of teachers meant we dropped our standard for entry to the profession far too low. It is better to have larger classes with better teachers than smaller classes with more teachers. Most WiseOnes teachers have taught classes of 35 or more. I have taught 43 with 3 grade levels in it. It was successful and individuals were catered for. It is how you do it that matters.

4. Male teachers have been scared out of the profession by the fear of being accused of sexual misconduct and the low pay that makes family raising harder. Children are lacking in comparative male examples of being and of learning. Pay rates for gifted males in other work is higher and more attractive even at principal level. We know ordinary gifted females who earn over $250,000 per year in other careers. Education can’t match that as there is no immediate income to offset the expense. Therefore the benefits have to be non financial—such as sabbatical leave, study leave, conference leave and funding, 5 weeks clear leave at Christmas holidays, all of the above would help as one is promoted. Teachers need to be refreshed. Too many are overstressed and not fresh and lively at all. Teachers need AH-HA moments and too many don’t get enough due to discipline and social problems faced every day.

5. Discipline in many low socio-economic areas is so bad that sensitive, principled, empathetic gifted teachers cannot stay there. They leave to protect their mental health. Poor food choices by families is a big problem as lack of balanced minerals and enzymes in raw foods damages brains and lead to irrational behaviours. Closing of the school tuck shop in one school led to a big
increase in test scores. This is worse for the gifted as they are more physically sensitive and reactive to imbalances and contaminants in foods. Dr Linda Silverman, Sue Dengate.

6. There is no compulsory study of giftedness in the preparation of new teachers. Those with higher IQs as measured by IQ tests should have a compulsory intensive semester on giftedness including the research on acceleration which is very positive. Only those should teach the gifted.

7. Acceleration should be promoted in schools as it is the No1 best response to significant difference in potential in children. It has proven to be emotionally, socially and intellectually beneficial providing the new teacher is empathetic and gifted. The teacher is more important than the grade level. If this was an accepted part of schools then two hindrances to the gifted would be removed- (i) the attitude of many primary teachers that the class members are “my children” and (ii) the notion that age level is linked to mental and social level for all children. WiseOnes type withdrawal groups in school time are the second best method according to research. No other assistance had statistically significant benefits. Mentoring can be successful.

WiseOnes teacher comment

My thinking is also that years ago the lower achievers were stigmatised and seen upon as 'different'. Over time with the thinking change and govt support that it's 'ok' to get some assistance and the govt provides funding via programs eg: reading recovery etc..... children are not so stigmatised and it normalises them in society's thinking. Teachers are better educated/aware of the needs of these children.

So, I see the gifted children as still back in the day of stigmatised lower achievers. The gifted are seen as 'different' and not catered for. If the govt helps by introducing more importance to this area via teacher training and beyond and finance gifted assistance in schools we may be on the way to greater acceptance/understanding of these children just as the lower achievers are now. It won't be so 'mysterious'.

Principal of a very low SES school comments.

WiseOnes worked with this school for 5 years but the Principal and I could not sustain the program.

There are, as you well know, many issues facing both the parents of a gifted and talented student and the gifted and talented student regardless of the socio economic area in which they live. For those living in a low SES area, I believe the issues are exacerbated. Some issues include:

- A total lack of understanding of what it means to be gifted and of some of the issues that a gifted student may face. e.g. social issues, hypersensitivity to sounds, smells, lights etc. There is lots written about ADHD, Depression, Trauma and so on, but there is little public awareness of giftedness and its issues. In my experience, some gifted and talented students, sadly, are regarded as “odd” or even, misfits, rather than valued.
- The lack of understanding of the special needs that a gifted student might require such as additional tuition (music and / or drama for instance) in order for them to reach their potential.
- The lack of financial resourcing to provide the sorts of experiences that would benefit the student – such as visits to interesting and stimulating places like museums, art galleries and historical sites or even for music or drama classes. Financial resources are available through a variety of channels, but parents in low SES areas often lack the capacity to access the available resourcing opportunities. Even when supported by the school to apply for grants, many are often reluctant to do so. Frequently this is because they have no understanding of how much their child would benefit.
- The lack of value that many residents in low SES areas have of education. Education is not seen by many, and it would appear, particularly generational unemployed Anglo Saxons as a way of breaking the poverty cycle.
The lack of funding in school Student Resource Packages (SRP) to allow for employment of staff to provide programs to meet the needs of Gifted and Talented students. These students are our future - hopefully they will be our decision makers, our scientists, our explorers and so on. Students who meet the requirements for funding under the Program for Students With Disabilities also have rights and needs and these students attract funding (well, minimal funding anyway) which can be used to support their learning needs. They however, do not have the same capacity to enhance our world to the same extent as students who are gifted and talented have.

Teacher training programs offer very little in the way of preparing teachers for teaching gifted and talented students. Many teachers and staff in schools lack the skills, understandings and strategies to communicate and deal with, let alone teach, gifted and talented students.

Gifted and talented students need “different” work to extend their thinking and to develop their potential. Too often in the classroom, through lack of understanding, gifted and talented students are “rewarded” for completing work quickly with more of the same work. The result of this is that they quickly learn to hide their abilities!

These are a few ideas that I have had. I hope they help with your submission. Please don’t hesitate to contact me to bounce ideas if you think that would be useful.

WiseOnes current practices

1. Very intensive screening of teacher applicants and intuitive and observational skills at interviews. Honest appraisal with the applicant and pointing out that any anguish, hidden behaviours or attitudes will be “seen” by the gifted children, fast. A good sense of humour is necessary. They cannot hide who they are. Sensitive children will not return to the program if the teacher has sadness or corruption in them. They cannot bear it.

2. Every person in WiseOnes has their own business so is totally self responsible for their own income. Poor performance means less income or loss of contract. Quality control is built in.

3. Quarterly training in giftedness and in teaching the gifted is provided including Socratic questioning, understanding empathy, moral reasoning, unhelpful gifted behaviours such as perfectionism and many other needs of the gifted usually not addressed in regular class. Full support through a non formal association is provided for all associated with WiseOnes including Public Liability Insurance of $20 million.

4. Free testing of all applicants for entry to the program with a culture free, language free, not B&W, proven test. Only those who qualify on the school’s decided entry level on or above the 90th percentile may enter. Trust parents who are about 78% right and class teachers without G&T training are 30% correct about the child’s ability. Experts are only 50% correct without testing.

5. Non profit businesses. All WiseOnes operate as non-profit businesses whatever their formal structure and WiseOnes and Education Managers provide scholarships for the poorest and most needy gifted at each school. These do not come out of fees paid. Altruism is common in a gifted life.

6. WiseOnes confronts staff by openly admitting giftedness and asking who is gifted on staff. It is challenging but a sense of humour helps a lot. WiseOnes teachers are taught how to overcome resentment and negative attitudes in staff members. A Principals’ brochure helps the Principals know what to expect and what can be done. Cases of teacher abuse of children attending the program are not unknown but all are reported to the principal of the school. It is obvious from our records that about half of all class teachers, and some office staff too, refuse to allow the children to attend or strongly discourage them. Office staff have refused to take the school G&T levy for the program.
7. If the school leaders are not gifted, or not the parents of gifted children, the program never gets into that school. We wait for a change of Principal and try again. (The chance factor of Prof Gagne.)

**Links between aboriginal and gifted ideas.** Understanding Indigenous Australia; for Health Care Providers: May 2007 © ISBN: 1 86487 876 2

A fragmented sense of self may result from a lack of cultural connection and a feeling of being misunderstood and misrepresented in society; being denied a voice in the political community, or being made to suppress or modify their aboriginality (Kendall & Marshall, 2004)

This applies to gifted children too. This is from the University of Sydney in 2007. Marie Behrens

Aboriginal people with a disability, even if an acknowledged disability, may be resistant to requesting assistance as a result of the belief that they either do not require, or perhaps do not deserve, such assistance. As a result, services that provide to Aboriginal people may feel their services are obsolete, unnecessary, or being pitched to a community that does not wish to change. This stereotyped perception may be damaging to both services and clients, perpetuating a cycle of disrupted communication and, thus, inadequate service provision and further disability. Same for the gifted.

Measurements, weights, time and quantities cannot be accurately translated into Aboriginal language.

The gifted want to add more information or present it in a different way.

Research on the Yolgnu community in the NT has shown that pauses between sentences, and when waiting for responses from some groups of Aboriginal people, may be longer than usually expected in non-Aboriginal Australian culture (Sharing the True Stories - Improving Communication in Indigenous Healthcare, 2006b). Long silences while considering one’s answer may be common. Not allowing an appropriate time period for a person to speak, regardless of who they are or where they might come from, may result in miscommunication, the assumption that the therapist knows what is about to be said, or that they have been misunderstood.

Same for the gifted who want to give a deeper answer.

Men’s issues’ and ‘women’s issues’ often relate to gender specific experiences, such as childbirth, menstruation and rites of passage, and cannot be discussed between members of the opposite sex. These issues are best dealt with by a therapist of the same gender. If this is not possible, calling on the assistance of other gender-appropriate health workers or community members, or leaving the door ajar to alleviate anxiety and indicate the presence of others, may be necessary. Care should be taken to gain permission before touching the client (Park, 1995).

The gifted too may be very private as 70% are introverted, need someone complex like themselves and need their autonomy respected as they are very self determining at an early age.

**Drug and alcohol abuse** can lead to cognitive, physiological or health impairment

Same for the gifted who feel despair of any change for them.

Aboriginal clients often find themselves feeling disempowered by their cultural context, or their treatment by health, medical and government staff. In order to make sure a client is empowered in your interaction with them, it is important to consult with them directly.

Read educators/school/teachers for the gifted. Have the child at the meetings.
The contacts provided above can help you to arrange community consultation. Allowing community members a level of program control and including community members in the decision making process is likely to produce greater acceptance of modification interventions, providing more effective health outcomes. Individuals are likely to have the best understanding of the impact of their health conditions on daily life, and can provide feedback as to the extent of their limitations, or the accuracy.

Listen to the parents. They are the experts, not the class teacher unless they are gifted and qualified.

Non-verbal communication can be a useful tool when speaking to both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Australians, including eye contact and body language. The use of eye contact and body language may differ between urban and rural areas. In urban Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian cultures it is often considered rude not to maintain eye contact, whereas in many traditional Aboriginal settings direct eye contact may be seen as rude, and as either a direct threat or a sexual advance. When communicating with an Aboriginal person, introducing yourself informally and observing their level of eye contact can assist you to know what is appropriate (Edis, 1998). Sitting or kneeling at the same level as the person so that you are not seated in a dominating position is a good idea, particularly with elders. This is the case in both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities.

Allowing extra time to meet with a client, chatting to them casually, being honest and open about your limited level of cultural knowledge and listening carefully, providing feedback and adopting a relaxed and casual approach, will enable your Aboriginal client to feel comfortable with you and open to disclose any necessary information you might require (Sloane, 2005b).

Many Aboriginal people will have English as their first language, however, it is possible that many commonly used words will have different meanings or be differently understood by Aboriginal speakers. Differences in communication styles, word usage and interpretation, can lead to unintended misunderstanding between health professionals and aboriginal people when discussing health issues and treatment (Edis, 1998).

Same for the gifted and average children- different vocabulary.

In some cases it may be seen as inappropriate for an Aboriginal person to disagree with something that has been said to them. This may be so in both distant relationships and relationships of perceived power, such as those between a service provider and an Aboriginal person. In such cases, a reply of ‘yes’ in answer to questions like ‘do you understand how to use this ramp?’, may not indicate a true understanding. Clients may be afraid of providing a wrong answer or, as a result of the traditional use of negotiation in Aboriginal cultures, may want to leave open an opportunity for negotiation in a future situation, and therefore be unwilling to disagree with what has been said (Sharing the True Stories - Improving Communication in Indigenous Healthcare, 2006b). Drawing diagrams and using pictures, gestures and concrete examples may help make explanations clearer.

Same for the gifted – extra knowledge means hesitation in Yes/No answers and not wanting to seem dumb.

Amazing how many similarities there are yet not so surprising, as all are human people with equal dignity whether aboriginal adult or gifted child.

“Treat me as an individual with respect for my being the way I am.”
WiseOnes had a meeting of all our teachers on 23rd May, and decided on the following as a recommendation to the Committee

1. Make Gifted Education compulsory in teacher training so teachers would be able to identify, understand and support these children better. It is a very complex and fast developing subject. The GERRIC program is good but it needs follow up regularly, not on the shelf as we’ve seen it.

2. Make it compulsory, and fund, the testing of all children in late Year Prep or early year 1 to pick up those with differences from average learning abilities and we will offer to train the teachers who do this. Apply this to all schools not just government schools. Maybe use a flying squad.

3. Make it a requisite that any gifted children receive follow up and the best that research has proven for them - acceleration and programs such as WiseOnes in school time. Teachers said that Reading Recovery was disputed and ignored at first but once funds were constantly available it became accepted in schools as “normal”. We want the same for the gifted in all schools. It is essential that non classroom performing gifted are in the programs.

4. In this way it would give the gifted more equity in the system, change the attitudes of the significant number of teachers who resent, fear and are very negative towards the gifted. The Committee has asked us specifically to address this negativity in our submission. It is not just a state problem but country wide and all systems.

5. Fund WiseOnes in areas such as Dandenong and Cranbourne and western suburbs where the poverty is not just in money but in culture, nutrition and family life. WiseOnes can change the future for them. Apply this to all schools not just government schools in these areas.

6. Give WiseOnes access to the school’s internet so that we can show research online in lessons and provide for smaller numbers in rural areas through creating online groups.

7. Enable us to use a program such as Elluminate at no cost to us, so no cost to parents. Then we can make a real difference for a gifted child in any school in the state because we could make small groups of 8 for them, being able to see each other and talk to each other on screen while sharing the teacher’s screen with the appropriate lessons. Distance education, like enrichment, is not gifted education.

We see this as a small start especially in changing the attitudes of many principals and teachers towards special provision for the gifted which is the greatest challenge for educators of the gifted. In some ways the previous policy of insisting that schools have to do it all themselves in class, mitigate against outside provision, but they still call a plumber for a special need. Dr Susan Nikakis found in her research that the teachers of the gifted need to be gifted themselves. We have found this to be true in WiseOnes too, but not all class teachers are gifted with the extra complexity of brain to match the child’s thinking. There is no meeting of minds, so the child feels lonely and sad, and sometimes the teacher too if the child acts up or opts out.

WiseOnes leaders would like to meet the Committee to answer questions and discuss possible consequences of this Inquiry. There may be ways that our expertise and that of others who make submissions can be amalgamated into a more workable policy and with successful follow up in action for the benefit of the children. We are all very experienced leaders and teachers in schools and have worked in gifted education for much longer than the existence of WiseOnes.

A very big concern is for those who are in schools further out than 25km from the city centre and not in the eastern suburbs. The whole environment is totally different and it worries me that city based experts and teachers make policy that cannot be achieved in outer suburban schools or rural schools under present circumstances. I have also noticed that there is a somewhat less than equal respect in attitude from some leaders in Gifted Education in universities, among psychologists and in teachers in wealthier schools that demonstrate total ignorance of what it is like for staff and parents in poorer areas and for gifted students with literacy disabilities or from tribal cultures. I want to make sure you are aware of that. Please read the part of our submission dealing with the likeness of gifted
needs to aboriginal needs and the six types of gifted personalities by Prof. Maureen Neihart. I believe many of our schools do not cater for 4 of the 6 types. I include government, Catholic, Lutheran and Christian schools, primary and secondary in this from personal experience and probably Islamic community schools from what I hear from teachers.

Thank you for holding this Inquiry

Pat Slattery on behalf of all the WiseOnes teachers.

Dip.Teach.B.Ed, B.Theol, COGE, AFACEL, MHIQS