Submission To the Education and Training Committee

Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students

Introduction

The following submission has been compiled by a group of individuals, parents and educators, who meet monthly to discuss issues relating to gifted and talented children and their families. Living in rural Victoria creates challenges for gifted and talented students due to lack of local support networks and resources and the group endeavours to support families and to facilitate workshops for children.

The points that we address in the submission centre around gifted and talented education particularly in rural settings as we believe that the problems experienced in the city are much greater in country areas.

Current policies and programs for gifted and talented students:-

1. Identification of Gifted and Talented Children

   Problems:-
   Despite availability of excellent information and resources for teachers and schools (www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/gifted), gifted children are not being identified and hence are not being catered for in classrooms. There is also a problem as teachers do not seem to know how to assess and report on children who are attaining a standard higher than that expected for their age. The frustration of both students and parents is evident in the stories in Appendix 1 and the surveys in Appendix 2. School teachers and principals have been receptive to the results of a number of students who have been assessed but they have been surprised by the superior or very superior scores that the children have attained. Gifted students seem to be able to develop superior reading and writing skills with limited support from the education system, however, development of mathematical knowledge is more difficult. Mathematics is a particular area of concern as students’ test results on the Wechsler Individual Aptitude Test (WIAT-III) reflect consistent, significant difference between Numeracy and Mathematical Reasoning Scores. The students demonstrate strong mathematical thinking but gaps in their knowledge and skills which seems to reflect limited learning opportunities in the classroom. One student had not been taught to multiply fractions and invented his own method by converting the fractions into decimals. Lack of mathematical background in primary school teachers is significantly limiting the progress and learning of gifted students.

   Suggestions:-
   • Professional development for teachers in identification of gifted and talented children.
   • Professional development for teachers in differentiation of curriculum for gifted children.
   • Further development of VELS on line demonstrations to show how to assess and cater for children who are performing above that expected for their age.
   • Mathematical training for Primary School teachers and/or employment of mathematics graduates/specialist to work in this education sector.
• Development of online resources for schools to access for gifted programs for their students.
• Development of gifted and talented rural school networks to share expertise and resources.

2. Equity of access to quality educational choices for gifted and talented children and their families.

Problems:
Gifted and talented children are being educated but their educational outcomes are still dependent on whether or not a teacher recognises their potential. Too many children are not provided with the learning opportunities appropriate for their intellectual ability and they are not taught at a rate or level of complexity that feeds their desire to learn. Personal reflections regarding this are highlighted in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. In rural communities parents have limited schools to choose from and often have to supplement their children’s education with outside activities. A number of rural families move their children to city schools to access quality educational choices. This may require moving the whole family, commuting long distances or boarding children in schools or with family members living in the city. These are very difficult decisions for families to make and should not be necessary as there should be quality educational choices for gifted children in their local communities. Currently a Year 6 student is attending tutoring after school to further her skills and knowledge as she is undertaking Year 6 work for a second time at school as she was in the top groups of a Year 5/6 composite class in 2010. Her parents are paying for the sessions in an effort to alleviate their daughter’s boredom at school and to maintain her love of learning. Another family are visiting local Primary schools to try to find one that could cater for their son who is in Kindergarten and can read at a Year 3 level and can work with numbers at a level normally expected of a year 2 student. He requires a supportive learning environment and an Individual Learning Plan just like any child with a learning disability would automatically receive. Families are often made to feel uncomfortable when they approach schools to discuss their gifted and talented children. Educational consultants and Psychologist are often used by families to be advocates for their child to improve their learning opportunities. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of support professionals in rural areas. Tragically some families do not realise that their children are gifted and talented and they can go undetected in schools and underachieve. Some are often mislabelled as they can become behavioural problems.

Suggestions:-
• Every school should have a Gifted and Talented Education Policy.
• There should be assessment initiatives to identify gifted and talented children from as early as kindergarten or prep.
• Implementation of Individual learning Plans and program Support Group meetings for gifted and talented students.
• Use of teaching aides and assistants in the classrooms to support the learning of gifted and talented students.
• Use of mentors in the community, industry and academia to support the individual students and their schools.
• Use of online courses and activities to increase the learning opportunities for gifted and talented students.
• Funding for schools, school networks and communities to develop exemplary gifted and talented education programs.

3. Impact on the learning development and wellbeing of gifted and talented students

Problems:
Underachievement, bullying, low self esteem and depression in gifted and talented students are commonly reported problems especially in upper primary and secondary years. Students complain of frustration at being given repetitive tasks that lack challenge, disappointment at not being given the opportunity to learn new and interesting things and sadness at not being like other children. Acceleration programs in Secondary School help but still do not provide adequate learning opportunities for students with superior intelligence. Social problems are often seen by schools to be created by lack of social skills in the gifted child and as a consequence bullying often takes place undetected. The frequency and nature of bullying is clearly illustrated in the stories written by gifted children in Appendix 3. The learning and wellbeing needs of gifted children are not always recognised by schools until there is a significant problem and sometimes this is too late as psychological harm has already taken place in the child.

Suggestions:-
• Improving the programs and curriculum differentiation for gifted children in schools to cater for their individual needs. The program for a student needs to be based on their abilities in different areas.
• Offering a range of lunchtime activities such as chess, music groups, book clubs, drama clubs, science clubs and existing extension programs such as Tournament of Minds, Maths Olympiad etc.
• Offering a rich co-curricular experience for students through music, drama, art and sport.
• To link gifted students in with local experts and resources such as libraries, theatres and art galleries. It should be noted that funding in rural areas may be required for these local facilities as they are often under resourced if they exist at all. (See Appendix 4)
• Providing an opportunity for gifted students to spend time together; a meeting of like minds.
• Introduce programs to change school community attitudes towards clever children making them more tolerant of difference.
• Introduce social training to help develop resilient behaviours in gifted children.
• To be vigilant in the school community in dealing with bullying and prejudice against gifted children.
• Provision for access to Psychologists and other mental health professional if need arises.
• Development of an on-line social networking site for gifted children to meet each other and work together on projects.

Written by Moragh Tyler BSc(Hons.)Psych, Post Grad Teaching Cert. MEdPsych. MAP on behalf of the interest group who meets in Wonthaggi to discuss gifted and talented children.
Appendix 1

Gifted Children’s Stories

Matteo’s story

We always knew that Matteo was intelligent. Just how intelligent, we did not know.

He was precocious in many aspects of his early development. Perhaps not the speech: he used to have his own language, which I understood and conveniently translated for everyone on his behalf. However, after giving birth to our second child I spent three days in hospital; when I returned home I found that he was speaking very intelligibly for everyone to understand him.

From an early age Matteo showed that he was trying to make sense of what surrounded him. An example is his declaration that Brendon, his good kindergarten friend of African origin, must have fallen into a patch of oil in the ocean.

Matteo spent the first 3 ½ years of his life in the Italian part of Switzerland; his first language was Italian, when we moved to Australia he learnt English very quickly, like many immigrant children in the same situation, and he adapted well to his new kindergarten. He listened very attentively as different topics were covered by the teacher, especially when they were talking about professions. Within a very short time he decided that he wanted to become a train driver, a teacher, a doctor, a vet, a dentist and an Aborigine!

His early primary school years were quite happy. He was lucky enough to have a very enthusiastic prep teacher who recognized how bright he was and encouraged him to follow his many interests. As the years passed, however, he was gradually left to cater for his own needs. He would give himself tasks, decide that, for a term, he would find out everything he could about space, whales, sharks, etc; in a very short time he would become a wealth of knowledge in the particular topic he was studying. He was 8 or 9 years old. I felt that I should approach the school but, at that point, my husband said that he had to get used to all sorts of teaching styles. The problem in these situations is that you feel like you are acting like a “pushy and overproud mother,” whereas the real concern is your child’s wellbeing. By the end of grade 3, with University of New South Wales and Naplan tests results in hand, I decided that I had to take action and went to talk to the principal. As a result, Matteo had for two years a teacher who perhaps did not give him enough challenge yet but at least tried, had a special learning plan for him, and acknowledged who he was. At a social level, however, things were not particularly good. He was quite isolated and pushed away from the, sporty, groups. He loved sports and team games but was not naturally talented in this field as he lacked some of the necessary coordination. Thanks to his focus, intensity and strong will, he was able to overcome these difficulties, but the word was subtly passed on through his peer group that there was no point for him to try out for school sports because there was no way he would get in. So he stopped trying out and, except for basketball, he stopped all after school sports.

In year 7 Matteo was accepted into an accelerated program and was happy for a while, thanks to a newly found independence and a couple of close friendships. About midyear he was very sick with what we thought was influenza but, in retrospective, could have been glandular fever. Following this illness, he became very lethargic and withdrawn. His academic progress was still excellent but, at home, we had noticed a change that we attributed to adolescence. He was growing and developing very quickly. It is towards the end of year 8 that he hit the bottom. Although the school kept reassuring us that he was one of the best and best-behaved students, we knew something was not right! He would spend his time at home lying on his bed doing hardly anything; he would not engage
in meaningful conversations with us and basically built walls between himself and us. My husband would get very angry but I knew deep down that it was more serious than a teenage attitude. One night I got very angry myself; the animated discussion that followed somehow brought down some walls and we had a long talk about what was going on in his life. He said that he felt lonely, that he did not have any friends with whom to share his interests because they were very immature (this was later confirmed by the school), he was bored "out of his wits", all he was doing was, wait, wait until he could go to university”). He was trying his best to "blend in, at school but, as he described it not long ago, he felt that "everything in his life was pointless". He was sinking into depression. We had tried to involve the school during the year but did not feel that our interventions had been taken very seriously, so we decided to seek independent help and advice.

Matteo was counselled and underwent a series of tests, which showed that his cognitive abilities were beyond year 12. The advice was to advance him into year 10, which the school accepted with some reserve (as a 1 term trial); they did not even want to see Matteo's test results. Term 1- is now behind us; we have not heard from the school yet and can only assume that they are satisfied. What we can see is that Matteo is much happier; he says it himself. He still does not work very much but his academic results are excellent. He has a nice group of friends, is involved in two school bands and the local citizens band, has started to play soccer again and plays sport at recess as well (for the first time in years). As parents, we are able to talk with him about just about anything. Our concern is that he is still not challenged enough and is not learning to work and organize his work.

**Maria Rosa's story**

Maria Rosa's story is quite different from her brother's in the respect that she has suffered more constant bullying and isolation over the years and that this has had a negative impact on her academic achievement. The fact that she is also gifted was certainly not recognized by most of her teachers’ she is now in grade 6 and the results of independent tests, which showed a natural intelligence in the top 5% came as a surprise to her. She has developed an attitude of not taking risks, which leads her to underachieve, particularly in mathematics. While provisions have been made to help her face the bullying issues, she is still very fragile and vulnerable. She easily doubts herself even in areas where she excels: she is extremely musical and her piano teacher has always been aware of her talent, but Maria Rosa does not believe it.

Matteo and Maria Rosa have a little sister, Julia, who is 8 years old this year. She also shows signs of great intelligence and we will organize for her to undergo tests before problems arise.

There are more gifted children than we think. Often parents are not aware of their children's giftedness and, if they are, they do not realise its full extent because they have followed their child since day one and have come to accept this as the norm. Parents and communities in general need help to identify the children's giftedness.

Parents need help to cater for their gifted children's needs: while the children need intellectual challenges, they also need to be children.

- When parents approach the teachers, they often refrain to talk about their children's intelligence and talents for fear of appearing "pushy" and "over the top"
- Schools and teachers need help not only to identify gifted children but also to develop programs that cater for them.
- Bullying (in particularly isolation) is a common and serious problem which many gifted children have to face. Parents and teacher need to be aware of this, and need to be provided with the means of identifying such problems early.

The needs of gifted children have to be addressed not for academic success but for their wellbeing: this is the primary concern as it is for all children whatever their intelligence.
Julia's Story:

Julia was born in 1998 when she was six weeks old she slept in a crib in the bedroom next to ours. Attached to the crib was a plastic musical bird. If you pulled the string on the bottom hard enough it played a tune.

One morning I was woken up to a screeching sound. On entering the room I found Julia desperately trying to pull the string even though she had nowhere near developed the motor skills to do so.

Julia's early childhood was filled with similar frustrations. My husband took her to the main street the weekend before Christmas when she was eighteen months old. They had a great time riding on a horse and carriage and seeing Santa when they got home she was desperate to tell me all about it but was unable to make the words as her neuromuscular system had not yet developed to the extent that she could form words.

However the thought that she could be gifted never really crossed my mind. I thought that gifted children crawled and walked early. Julia if anything lagged behind her peers in these things.

At nursery school Julia's friendships were of a very intense type. She once had a near nervous breakdown when I took her to nursery and she realised that her "best friend", was dressed in a party dress whilst she was wearing jeans.

At the age of four I took Julia to see a concert. We were living in Scotland at the time and I took her to see the Scottish National Children's Orchestra. They were to play in the first half and the Youth Orchestra was to play after the interval. My plan was that we would go, Julia would wriggle her way through the first half and then at the interval we would go home.

Julia loved the first half and spent the whole time pretending to conduct the orchestra. She begged me to let her see the second half which she sat through beautifully. The youth orchestra played Mozart's fortieth symphony, which she correctly recognised about a month later. Since that night she begged me to be allowed to play the violin.

On our return to Australia, shortly before her fifth birthday I caved in and arranged for Julia to have violin lessons. Less than a year later she won first prize at the local eisteddfod despite being the youngest competitor by far, and at the age of seven she was awarded a high distinction by AMEB for her grade one exam.

However I still did not identify her as being "gifted". Whilst all this was happening Julia started school where she did not seem to flourish academically. She was one of the last in the class to learn to read, and reports from her teacher were that she was easily distracted. She was also teased by the other children because she spent most of the day singing.

As she got older she did start to do better academically, especially in the areas of reading and writing. In grade 2 she was placed in an extended maths group which she really enjoyed and her Naplan (then AIM) tests in grade 3 showed very high results.

However there were always "social problems" which were the main topics of parent teacher interviews such that I was distracted from her academic success.
She expected a good deal from her friends in terms of loyalty and often felt betrayed by them if they played with other children. She was not a popular child because she had very different interests from a lot of her peers. Other children found her difficult to get along with and she got very frustrated by them. She was often teased, bullied and excluded.

In grade 5 things got especially bad and the school in desperation referred us to see a psychologist. IQ and academic testing were performed which showed Julia to be gifted especially in the area of verbal comprehension where she has a ceiling percentile. She also scored very highly in the areas of abstract reasoning and perceptual reasoning. She was shown to be years ahead in reading and spelling.

After a lot of consideration we decided that Julia should skip year 6. We were very fortunate to get her a place as a weekly boarder at a Melbourne independent school with a superb music programme. whilst there were a few teething problems with such a huge change, Julia is now in grade eight and is extremely happy and is flying both socially and academically.

CONCERNS

I feel concerned that Julia's giftedness went unrecognised throughout the early years of her education. Whilst we have been extremely fortunate that we have had the resources to be able to resolve Julia's problems the way we did, I feel very concerned for the many other gifted children in Australia who do not have these opportunities and whose giftedness may remain unrecognised.

SOME ANECDOTES:

All my children find writing out their spelling words every day for homework very tiresome as they do not need to go to such lengths to learn to spell a word. Whenever I have addressed this with the school they have responded by giving them more difficult words to learn' I feel this has not really addressed the problem as they find repeatedly writing the more difficult words just as tiresome and I feel concerned that they are having “gaps” as they have not learnt the easier words.

By early grade 2 all the children have been fluent readers and have loved reading, so much so that I have to drag them out of their books. However at this stage it is still necessary to record every night what was read, how much was read and get it signed by the parent. I have found at this stage that this is a great shame as it tends to turn what is a great pleasure and delight for them into something that is just another “homework chore”

Julia finds writing short stories very difficult as her stories are all wonderful and complex and long. She recently had a story returned to her unmarked because whilst her English teacher admitted it was a superb story; Julia had not addressed the criteria she was supposed to address in the story. Julia however feels she has addressed the criteria in a very clever and complex way and is refusing to rewrite the story. This is not the first time this kind of thing has happened and I am a little concerned about it- it would be good to sort it out before she fails VCE English because of it, However when I approached the teacher about it I was assured that Julia is an excellent English Student, the story was wonderful and I shouldn't worry myself about it.

Personal experience has led me to believe that:-

1. Teachers should receive training so that they can:
a. identify gifted children.
b. Not fear gifted children.
c. Be able to develop individual learning plans for gifted children.

2. It be realised that:
   a. Vertical extension (e.g. early school start or skipping a grade) is a good option for some gifted children and this should be readily available, however
   b. Lateral extension is also very important and all gifted children’s programmes should include this aspect
   c. It is often the way things are taught that is the problem rather than what is being taught
   d. The parents of gifted children usually have only the child’s well being at heart and should be able to approach teachers on this matter without feeling as if they are being “pushy”
   e. Gifted children often need individual learning plans in the same way as children who struggle with the curriculum.

3. It is very important that we took after the educational needs of gifted children:
   a. For the good of that child - gifted children “drop out”, of an educational system that does not meet their needs
   b. For the good of the community and the world - if we nurture gifted children they will be the ones who grow up and find cures for cancer, AIDS and solve other complex problems for humanity.

4. Gifted children are more likely to suffer from social problems at school. This should be addressed by:
   a. Social education taught to the whole school community to highlight that everyone is different and special.
   b. Gifted children to be taught resilience
My Son’s Story

I am the parent of a child who would meet the definition of having talents in a number of areas. He has recently turned thirteen. Approximately eight months ago I began attending a parent/educator interest group in Wonthaggi which was established voluntarily by a local educational psychologist Moragh Tyler. Moragh has a special interest in the area of gifted education and through her professional role in a local school could see that there was an obvious need for this kind of support in our rural community. It has only been since attending this group and speaking to other parents in similar situations that I feel I have had parenting support and been able to gain insight and understanding in the unique traits and many life challenges that gifted children encounter particularly within our current education system.

Recently my son has begun attending a “writers group” set up specifically for gifted and talented children as a result of the interest group. It has become one of my son’s favourite weekly activities, even though prior to attending I wouldn’t have said that writing was really one his chosen pursuits. However the stimulating way that information has been presented, the challenges offered, and the coming together of “like minds” which has acknowledged and celebrated his abilities has been enlightening and empowering for him. He has also, revelled in the school holiday Maths workshops for gifted children. Primary education has provided many challenges for our son as he has often been labelled as over sensitive and has difficulty coping emotionally when other children have ridiculed him and tried to "bring him down" for having significant success in academic and sporting endeavours.

As a parent I hope this enquiry will address the additional needs that gifted children have and that extra resources are invested in providing programs and support for all involved children, families and educators. In my experience teachers generally have been very unwilling to openly acknowledge and cater for children’s unique abilities. I feel it would be extremely beneficial if all educational settings could be provided with appropriate support and training to ensure that teachers feel that they can confidently and expertly provide quality educational opportunities for gifted and talented children. In my view a very important outcome being the acknowledgement and understanding that gifted and talented children do have specific educational needs that have to be addressed to ensure that they are provided with the best possible opportunities to mature and develop into secure, happy and motivated adults with good self esteem.
A Reflection on Parenting a Gifted Child by a Concerned Parent

I have been really stressed and anxious about James and it was great to be able to talk to people who understand. I get worried talking to people about him because often I feel like people think I am bragging or think what am I worried about it's the kids who struggle to read and write that need help. I feel bad but I do sometimes wish he just was in the "normal" range because he is much less likely to be picked on, have social problems and feel isolated from his peers. I really have to keep reminding myself it is a gift he has been given in these areas and that each child has gifts and I don't wish other kids gifts away.
Students Who Attended Workshops were asked to complete Surveys

What Grade are you in?

6

Things you like about school

Can't think of anything

Things you don't like about school

everything

What could happen to make school really good for you?

more extra-curricular activities
What Grade are you in?
6

Things you like about school
That it has 15 people
So we get a lot of
education.

Things you don't like about school
I don't really have
any friends because
there are so little
people

What could happen to make school really good for you?
My best friend
One of my best friends
can could move back
to Rongwe to a come
back to my school.
What Grade are you in?
year 7

Things you like about school
all different subjects
and all of my friends.

Things you don’t like about school
Bullies and grades with 25 children.

What could happen to make school really good for you?
make subjects engaging and sometimes more challenging.
What Grade are you in?

grade 8

Things you like about school

* Friends
* School production
* Some classes - science, music, art, math
* The teachers at my current English school - they are considerate and they listen

Things you don’t like about school

* Having to write out spelling words five times
* Partnering up ourselves
* Boring homework if it’s interesting I love it!
* Music classes with bad teachers who

What could happen to make school really good for you?

* Sometimes in English just being able to write anything you want with no criteria.
* Learning things like spelling yourself
* Extended music class for those who are at a certain level where we class just go on Sebastian and other
* Whatever

Julia Hackett
What Grade are you in?
Gr 2

Things you like about school
sport
work
writing
stories

Things you don't like about school
Not being advanced
and reading is too easy

What could happen to make school really good for you?
Being advanced
and having harder reading and books
What Grade are you in? 6

Things you like about school

P.E., Drama, Music

Things you don't like about school

Maths, spelling

What could happen to make school really good for you?

More Drama!
What Grade are you in? grade 2

Things you like about school like sports, lunch, play and work.

Things you don't like about school I don't like at school spelling, handwriting and recount.

What things would there be at school to make it really good for you? I want there to be a book club, dancing club, music club and a drawing club.
Questions about school

1. What do you like about school?
   - Make us good friends

2. What do you dislike about school
   - Able of the work
   - Boring and easy

3. School would be really brilliant if
   - the work interesting
     I want the maths to be harder and more interesting
     I'd like to change the way the schools
     make children do their spelling and homework by making
     writing and other subjects to be better and more
     interesting. I wish English, reading, science
     for gifted children.

Alasdair!
What Grade are you in?
4

Things you like about school
There is only 15 kids in our school so we get to learn more.

Things you don't like about school
We don't get to have SRC or other stuff.

What could happen to make school really good for you?
We could have more sport lessons.
Appendix 3                         Stories from the Writing Workshop

A two hour writer’s workshop was held during the Easter school holidays. The six students who attended brainstormed being gifted and talented. They used the PMI De Bono thinking tool. They identified many positives, minuses and interesting observations about being gifted. The children who ranged from Year 4 to Year 8 students then wrote their stories. Four out of the six children wrote about bullying and prejudice because they had personal experience of this and felt it was the most important issue for gifted children. The following are the stories written during that session.
The Bully

One day Jack was having a stroll in the park doing his extra homework his teacher had gave him. Then he saw a group of kids walking up to him. Leading them was the school bully, Peter. He said, “What’ya doing geek, extra homework?”
Jack replied softly, “Yeah.”
Peter snarled, “Well let’s see.”
Jack said, “Why?”
Peter started getting angry and growled, “Because.” “Now let me see!”
Jack bravely spoke back, “Because is not a reason.”
Then Jack felt something smack him hard in his right cheek. Suddenly everything went black. He woke up and saw Peter’s friends sitting on his bed. He looked at them astonished. They didn’t look mean any more. At that moment Jack moaned, “How did I get here.”
One of the boys said caringly, “We carried you back here after Peter punched you.” Jack felt his cheek it had swelled up and there was a stab of pain.
Then he inquired, “Why did you carry me back.”
Then one of Peter’s other friends said, “The only reason we hanged around Peter is because we were scared of him. We decided not to any more.”
Then Jack said, “Where’s Peter!”
Another one of them said “He went home.”
Jack said, “Halleluiah.”
New friends are silver old friends are gold!

The first day of grade 3 was terrible, just because someone is a bit of a Einstein doesn’t mean you have to treat them like an alien from Mars. Oh, sorry I didn’t mention my name, I am Flynn and I am a bit of a brainiac. I arrived at school and was walking along when I saw my best friend Campbell walking along with the school bully, Marcus! I sidled slowly and carefully up to the pair of figures but when they saw me they started walking purposefully in the other direction (What did I do to them?!). The bell rang and I walked sadly back to class. Cam didn’t even try to sit near me, the very opposite, he sat away from me! I spent the rest of the math class doing Grade 5 work and listening to James pick his nose next to me(eww!). Mum said that Cam and I will get over it and our friendship will be as good as new by Wednesday at the latest, but it didn’t happen being alienated and excluded until one day something strange happened... I was sitting ALONE reading Harry Potter as I have been for two weeks now when Campbell came up and sat down beside me, I ignored him for about 5 minutes before realizing that Campbell McKenzie was crying. I asked him what was wrong in a reasonable voice and he answered back rather shakily “ I’m sorry I was so mean to you and I realize now that it was because I was so obsessed with being cool that I turned into a bully which was really uncool and selfish and I hope you can forgive me.” “I forgive you.” I said, and that is what made term 1 of grade three so amazingly fantastic!

By Spalding (Year 6 Student)
Smartness and Friendships? Bad combination!
By Maria Rosa Gatto

I looked out of the window, bored out of my mind. It had been an hour since I finished my work and the teacher was busy with Angelina, who had trouble with her work. I put up my hand. "I've finished. Would you like me to help Angelina?"

"That would be wonderful. First let me check your work." Ms Keesh went over to my desk and looked over my story.

"This story..." she paused for a minute. "... Is a good story, but where is the excitement, the adventure? The only thing you write about is sad, sad, and sad."

"That's what I'm good at," I grumbled. It was like this every week. Ms Keesh was never satisfied with anything I wrote. It was always the same: more action, more adventure (more boring in my opinion).

I decided to write about something else, about what it was like to be me. Apart from being super smart and having the skills of a grown adult, I also had no friends, since they all went off to high school and one went to boarding school in London. At recess and lunch, all I did was walk around, watching all the other girls play sport or truth or dare. It was painful because last year, that was me.

That was a good day. A bad day, not even the people around me, the really nice people talked to me in class or out. I spent recess and lunch crying in the toilets, not daring to come out until the bell rung for afternoon classes.

Camp was coming up and I was dreading it. When I had to put down two people that I wanted in my cabin, I put down the first two names that I thought of: Gabrielle, the new girl, and Hannah, the girl I sat next to in class.

Finally, the dreaded day arrived. I pretended to be sick but mum made me go. I got on the bus and sat in one of the middle rows. Someone tried to sit next to me, but my bag was on the seat next to me. I preferred someone not sitting next to me to make fun of me. I got my book out and got lost in my book for the whole trip.

We got to camp and we had to find the cabin with our names next to it. To my bad luck, I was put with the popular girls. They tried to get me to talk to them:

"Come on, talk to us!"

That was from Hannah.

"You can’t stay quiet forever"

Gabrielle
“Don’t make me have to scream”

Maddy

I said one thing:

“I can’t trust you.”

“Yes you can.”

“No”

“Yes”

I gave in. “Alright, but if anything happens to me from any of your other friends, it’s over.”

For the rest of camp, I had fun. The activities were really fun and my room won all the room inspections and the end of camp treasure hunt. I didn’t want to leave the camp. I should have known that fun can’t last.

We got back to school and did a worksheet. I thought I could trust them but then, one of my friends told me that the others were only my friends because the teacher asked them to. I was really sad about that. Then I remembered that I had seen the teacher talking to my “friends” the day before camp.

I went back to my normal routine of hiding in the toilets and being what was commonly referred to as a loner. I found life worse but that’s the price you have to pay if you’re smart. Maddy kept trying to talk to me but I didn’t want to have friends that were assigned to be my friends like it was a school project. Mum took my ex-friends’ side: “Give them another chance, they’re better than nothing,” blah de blah de blah.

I didn’t want to, but I gave in. You can’t argue with your mum. Maddy was really good about it and I actually got friends after three months of walking around alone.
“Mother!” Yelled Bartholomew as he waited impatiently in the back seat of the Jamison’s family sedan. “Don’t mix your neutrinos with your carbon atoms Bart!” Yelled Ruby Jamison in confusing scientist talk, she also just happened to be Bartholomew’s mother. “I’m just getting my coat on” “but I might be late for the school science fair!” Yelled Bartholomew in a slight panic. “If I wait any longer I might start to hyperventilate!” “Don’t worry I’m here” his mother said as she hopped into the car and started the engine. Slowly a smile crept over Bart’s face as he realized that all his hard work was going to pay off.

Bartholomew came from an extremely intelligent family of physicists and was extremely intelligent himself. He could grasp concepts very quickly and was always open to new learning. He topped his class in every possible thing there was except for physical education. He was bottom of the class in that. Although he was intelligent, he found it a lot of trouble making friends. He sat by himself in every class and was constantly bullied about being smart. It was as though the other kids couldn’t accept a “brainiac” as they called him, in their class.

There was only on day of the year that Bartholomew could look forward too. And that day was today, the Madison
Primary School’s annual science fair. He had worked for months on his project which was definitely above his level. At the start of the year he had designed a machine that could dissolve an un-biodegradable material such as plastic and produce a substance which could be substituted for fuel. He called this substance hexo carbon polyurethane. A word which none of his class mates could pronounce out loud. If this machine wasn’t something they could play, smash or hit someone over the head with, they weren’t interested, even though he tried his best to explain it with small words. It still managed to get him bullied after school though. He had spent night after night pleading with his parents to buy him the adequate materials for the machine which they did on one strict condition which was that Bartholomew was required to make at least one friend this year. He had lived up to his part so his parents lived up to theirs.

His new friend was Hayden Jonathan. Hayden was smart for his year level, not quite like Bartholomew but smart knotholes. He had helped Bartholomew construct the machine with the help of his father who happened to be a construction worker. It had take four months to build the machine and they had their first successful test a week before the science fair. Hayden inserted a small piece of plastic from a Chinese food container into the machine via the funnel on the top. The machine had begun to cough and splutter and soon a small amount of multicolored hexo
carbon polyurethane poured out of the back of the machine. “Quickly!” yelled Bartholomew, “we must conserve the H.C.P” Hayden grabbed a cup from Bartholomew’s workbench and thrust it under the tap at the back of the machine. They both watched several drops of H.C.P fell into the cup. It was a wonderful success.

At the science fair everyone from grade 2 to grade 6 was there. Lots of experiments and demonstrations were going on. Everyone wandered around the displays. Bartholomew and Hayden stood proudly next to their advanced, record breaking machine but sadly people were avoiding his machine. It was as though there was a barrier around their exhibit. Everyone was standing around the exhibit of a popular boy who had a guinea pig wired up to a heart rate monitor running around on a spinning wheel. Everyone was clapping and laughing and giving high fives. Bartholomew couldn’t believe his eyes. He had done that experiment when he was 5! About 5 minutes later the voting began for the best science project. Everyone was required to vote by putting a small piece of paper into a small ballot box. When the principle stood up to announce the winner at the front of the school. “The winner of the best science project is..........” Bartholomew waited for his name to be called out.
Bartholomew sat in the back of his car with his mother. He sobbed quietly, he was so disappointed that he had lost in a supposedly “fair vote”. It was more of a popularity contest.
May 5th 2011
Mr. A Bawden CEO
Bass Coast Shire
Wonthaggi, 3995

To all concerned,

When considering the various reasons why Bass Coast Shire should place the provision of a principal library on top of their to-do list, have councillors at all considered the access to quality education choices for talented and gifted children and their families?

All members of our community should have access to new forms of information and technology. Many of the younger members of our community do not have access either within the family home or in over crowded school situations to the best possible study options. Sometimes all that is needed is a place for quiet study where computer access and reference materials are at hand. Of course this does not apply only to young people but all age groups in the community.

Currently, our library has one small private study desk placed in the junior fiction section of the library. This is totally inadequate for serious study purposes and should be addressed as soon as possible.

As a prime community facility I consider it vital that the library should lead the way in offering access to quality education choices, especially to talented and gifted students who are the future of our country.

Yours truly,

[Signature]

(Official Wonthaggi Library Support)
In our town of Wonthaggi there are some wonderful opportunities for children to participate in music.

We have a fantastic Citizen's band and theatrical group. Members of these groups are very good at involving children and young people.

There are also good music programmes at school at the secondary level. There are some talented individuals who seek to provide musical opportunities to others.

However there are simply not enough instrumental teachers to go round. There used to be a band programme at my children's primary school but that folded when the teacher involved relocated. There are not enough private teachers and many children in Wonthaggi who want to learn to play an instrument are unable to do so because of this.

In addition the type of instrument catered for is very narrow. My daughter plays the violin and we used to have to travel to Warragul (an hour long trip on a treacherous mountain road) in order for her to have lessons.

It would be good if there was a choir programme in schools. A friend and I used to run a choir at the school but it folded due to lack of attendance. This was because the choir took place at lunchtime and the students did not want to miss their play. It would be good if choral singing could be part of the curriculum and choir could be held in school time.

Children who are musical often do not seem to gain the same recognition as children who do well in sport. It would be good if children could compete musically in the same way they do for sport so that these children feel that their talent is valued in a rural society.

It would be really good if incentives were given for instrumental teachers (maybe from the City) to visit the primary schools so that they could offer a music programme as good as city schools. Perhaps there could be an incentive for these teachers to teach privately as well.

The value of learning a musical instrument as a child cannot be underestimated. Many researchers have linked musical education in early childhood with greater success in both mathematics and language development. In addition music can become a lifelong passion and very enriching for the young person. I firmly feel that rural children deserve the same opportunities as city kids when it comes to this important subject.

Tonya Hackett
I have been employed as a Preschool Field Officer for approximately the past twenty years in three different rural municipalities: Geelong, Bass Coast and South Gippsland. As a Preschool Field Officer my role is to work with children with additional needs and their families in State funded four year old kindergarten programs. My primary referral source is from kindergarten teachers with other referral sources being parents, Maternal and Child Health Nurses, Allied Health and Early Intervention staff.

In my twenty years in this role where the service averages approximately eighty to one hundred new referrals every year, I have never had a referral seeking support directly for a child who has been identified as being gifted. I however every year I receive a number of referrals for children who kinder staff observe as having challenging behaviour, or social emotional difficulties. Yet when I go to the kindergarten to observe the child in the kindergarten setting and speak to the family, it is my professional view that these children are very likely to be intellectually gifted. It has been my experience that most early childhood educators have limited understanding of the needs of these children and the implications that their unique abilities have on their development and inclusion within the large kindergarten group setting.

During my many years of involvement in the field of early childhood I have difficulty recalling any training that has been provided in our rural region, or possible funding opportunities (to assist with establishing rural training in this very specialised area of education) which would assist educators in identifying gifted children or planning for their developmental needs in early childhood settings. Anecdotally I feel that many of these children are inappropriately labelled as emotionally and socially delayed, odd, misfits, behaviourally challenging or attention seeking.

As a professional one of the key roles of my position as a Preschool Field Officer is to refer families to specialist agencies for appropriate ongoing support and further developmental assessment if appropriate. However in the rural municipalities that I have worked in, the only possibility for referral for a formal assessment for giftedness has been through private Psychologists, which in my experience has been beyond the financial means of the majority of families. I feel that for many gifted children formal assessments can be essential in assisting their family and educators to gain insight and understanding of their needs and unique talents.

Therefore as an outcome of this enquiry I would like to see the issue of training for educators re the educational needs of gifted children and the also the accessibility of appropriate assessment and ongoing support for children and their parents addressed as areas of priority.

Michelle Gough