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Foreword

Over the past decade, there has been a growing Australian concern with the middle years of schooling and the obvious requirement to change educational practice to provide more adequately for the needs of young adolescents. While there are students who respond well to the traditional secondary curriculum, this does not disguise the frustration and sense of alienation that many others experience during these years. While some become rebellious and openly oppose the school, there are large numbers who conform without enthusiasm, who find little relevance in the learning activities provided, and who are rarely inspired by the curriculum or the teaching strategies employed.

To their credit, many schools are aware of the problems that have arisen and are implementing a range of innovative ideas relating to the curriculum, the organisation of the school and classroom management. Others are tackling the primary/secondary transition and seeking to reduce the discontinuity that is often apparent.

While reform does not proceed at a fast pace, it is becoming more pronounced at school, district and system level. As a consequence, it is possible to detect the trends across Australia and some of the major ways in which educators are tackling the problem.

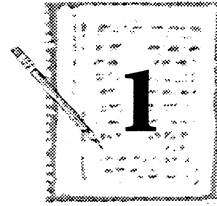
This small book aims to introduce readers to the middle years of schooling and to the major issues involved. It draws on the experiences of schools in all Australian states and territories and indicates how many are meeting and overcoming some of the difficulties that have arisen.

I am indebted to all teachers and school administrators with whom I have worked on the middle years of schooling. It has been my privilege to visit and learn from individual schools, clusters of schools, staff meetings, inter-school professional development days, and district meetings. I am particularly grateful to officers of the Northern Territory Department of Education and the Department of Education, Victoria, for the close working relationship they have afforded me and for the opportunity to work in their schools.

It is hoped that this publication will assist those who are likewise seeking to enhance the educational opportunities of young adolescents and to provide education that is enjoyable and relevant to their needs.

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The Background

New Directions

There was a feeling of excitement as an enthusiastic crowd awaited the opening of the international-style conference at the World Congress Centre in Melbourne in January 1997. Although advance publicity had not been overly aggressive, more than 800 had registered for the event, causing the sponsors¹ to widen the proposed program and hastily change the venue to accommodate the overwhelming numbers who wished to attend.

The conference theme, *Using Your Brain*, centred on the notion of multiple intelligences, a concept that had gained increasing popularity among Australian educators over the previous five years. Now the audience had the chance to hear three internationally acclaimed experts, Professor Howard Gardner, David Lazear and Dr. Robin Fogarty, explore the topic and tease out its relevance for the classroom.

While many were teachers from government, catholic and other independent schools and colleges, a wider spectrum of professionals was also represented, including administrators, psychologists and counsellors, careers advisors, curriculum consultants, academics, publishers, parents and community-service personnel drawn from all Australian states and territories and from overseas. Many had given up a part of their annual vacation to attend, a reflection of the significance they attached to the conference theme. Educators came expecting to be challenged professionally, seeking to gain new insights into school-related abilities, and hoping to

¹ Hawker Brownlow Education

explore new ways of providing for the talents of children, adolescents and tertiary students. Their expectations were extremely high.

Over the ensuing three days, keynote speakers and workshop leaders probed the nature of the intelligences and their relationship to student achievement. Global intelligence (usually measured through a test of intelligence or general abilities) was de-emphasised, even shunned, in favour of a wider range of abilities that were amenable to development through appropriate child-rearing approaches and good classroom practices. The audience was not disappointed: the calibre of the presentations was high, the practical implications were spelled out, and the participants went home challenged with a wider and deeper sense of educational purpose.

Why Such Interest?

Why was the audience so responsive and why did many educators entertain, even embrace, the notion of multiple intelligences (or MI) so positively? After all, they were relatively astute teachers, administrators and parents who were unlikely to espouse new ideas uncritically or to forego existing approaches without measured reflection. Their educational experience and expertise were unquestioned.

They certainly did not accept seven multiple intelligences because they were convinced of their absolute nature. Indeed, Gardner himself admitted that recent research had led him to propose eight intelligences with a likelihood that others might be revealed. Nor could teachers maintain that multiple intelligences provided a purpose for education. As the speakers constantly stressed: the teaching of multiple intelligences is not an end in itself: teachers must formulate the purposes of education themselves before turning to the multiple intelligences for assistance.

Those who reflected on the needs of the audience and the motives underlying their participation discerned five major reasons to explain the apparent acceptance of the MI message and the new directions it foreshadowed.

- In the first place, there was a concern that the older concept of intelligence or ability was too confined and provided only limited assistance for classroom teachers. While an IQ score of 130 might indicate a significant difference in learning potential from an IQ of 100, it did not explain other aspects of learning such as motivation, achievement or underachievement, the appearance of specialised