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# Section A

## Background

The three chapters in Section A provide background information that is required for a closer understanding of the different approaches outlined in later sections.

Chapter 1 outlines the reactions that are constantly encountered within schools to the notion of *giftedness*. It explores the opinions of the staff of one school and analyses the bases of their beliefs. Comments about *giftedness* and *gifted children* are examined and the assumptions underlying their viewpoints are considered.

Chapter 2 delves into the nature of *giftedness* and *talent*. Definitions of giftedness have changed over time and this has influenced the type of educational program that has been provided. A *developmental* concept of giftedness is accepted and some of the general implications for the school are noted.

Chapter 3 maintains that the school environment can have a crucial influence on the development and expression of talent. The school is asked to concentrate on attitudes and values, identification procedures, the training of processes and skills, the extension of the student's world and the provision of challenging and appropriate experiences.

A total-school approach is advocated in which all students are involved.



# Chapter 1

## Reactions to Giftedness

Have you noticed that the mention of *giftedness* or *gifted students* is easily accepted by some teachers, parents and other members of the school community but causes quite a stir among others who object to its discussion? The issue can lead to animated debate in the staffroom or cause dissension in the staff meeting. Moreover, there is no certainty that such an exchange may not become quite emotive.

A school principal once revealed that she was assured of a strong attendance at the Parent Meeting on the coldest night in winter if *Gifted Education* was publicised on the agenda.

Why does this strength of opinion exist? After all, educators are aware that students have different abilities and that some have outstanding qualities in specialised areas. Is it so wrong to provide education in line with each student's abilities? Some are opposed to *different* provision for gifted students while others object strongly to *separate* provision. Many antagonists argue that giftedness has an elitist tag and should be downplayed while others (often with a political bent) associate giftedness with empowerment and domination.

Despite differences of opinion, the topic is important to educators and gives rise to two related questions:

- \* What are the reactions of teachers and parents to the issues of *giftedness* and *gifted education* in Australia and New Zealand?
- \* What are the foundations on which arguments and reactions are based?

This chapter is based on the experiences of one particular school but you will find that the reactions discussed are pertinent across all schools and systems.

### When Giftedness Attracts

Pamela quickly discovered that young Jenny was a very bright child. She had taken over her new class a few days previously and was gradually learning about the 27 children in her Year 2 group. When she asked them, "What do you think makes a sailing boat move?" the children were sure that *the water* made the sailing boat move along. But seven-year-old Jenny volunteered a different explanation:

*if the wind is blowing, the wind makes the boat go; but sometimes it is the water if it is moving fast; or you can get a paddle like an oar and make the boat go too.*

The youngster's answer indicated advanced thinking and the ability to consider a number of alternatives at the same time. She was the only one in the group who reached such a level and Pamela decided to talk to the child's