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I ntroduction

A Developing Research Culture

Wilma Vialle and John Geake

The pendulum of interest in gifted education has swung dramatically during the twentieth century, largely in response to prevailing political and economic pressures. Throughout Australia there has been a growing interest in gifted education over the last decade with the establishment of increasing numbers of selective schools and specialist classes. This resurgence of interest has also been evident in state government and territory departments of education.

These changes at the political level have largely been the result of principled advocacy for the educational rights of gifted children. The Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT) has been at the forefront in providing an avenue for such advocacy for parents, teachers, academics, counsellors and other professionals interested in gifted education.

Since its inception, the AAEGT – along with its associated state associations – has attempted to lift the profile of gifted education by promoting good practice and good research. In looking back over the past century, then, this chapter will briefly note the key activities related to gifted programs during that time, before focusing on the research in gifted education since the publication of the first *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* in 1992. In particular, we will examine the contributions made to the field of gifted education by Australian researchers.

A Brief History of Provision for Gifted Students in Australia

The history of gifted education in Australia bears many similarities to those widely documented in Great Britain and the United States. Its smaller



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Forty articles, published in the AJGE from 1992 to 2002 were grouped together under the theme of 'Pedagogy and Curriculum' (refer pp. xxxii–xxxiii). These ranged from articles relating to particular teaching and curricular approaches (e.g. creative problem solving) or disciplines (e.g. mathematics) to broader considerations of provision (e.g. acceleration, enrichment), grouping (including selective schooling), and other school organisational decisions. The majority of articles relating to this theme are descriptive with less than one third drawing on research for their conclusions. The descriptive articles tend to present particular curricular approaches or programs and these are certainly important in terms of providing examples of designed curricula appropriate for gifted students. The topics covered included: the use of mind maps as part of research skill development; independent projects; book clubs; integrated themes at the secondary level; the Esperance PEAC telematics project; thinking skills; computer technology; mathematics programs; creative thinking programs; autonomous learning; Multiple Intelligences; global education; philosophy; and leadership skills. In addition, initiatives such as the Western Australian Primary Extension and Challenge Program (PEAC) and South Australia's 'Establishing Pathways' program were shared with the journal's readership. The research-based articles cover some of the issues listed above but also reflect some 'bigger picture' issues such as outcomes-based planning for gifted students; cooperative projects across schools; selective schooling; and the effective use of school time.

Almost nothing provokes as much controversy as acceleration. On the international stage, the research is unequivocal in its support of appropriate accelerative practices as one platform for meeting the needs of gifted students. However, it is vigorously resisted in