

# Chapter 1

## Giftedness and Talent in Australasia

Nadine Ballam and Roger Moltzen

### 1.1 Introduction

The impetus for this book was a desire to make contemporary research more accessible to those with an interest in giftedness and talent; policymakers, researchers, students, practitioners, parents and gifted individuals themselves. The end product of doctoral research has traditionally been a large thesis that sits on either a physical or virtual ‘shelf’. This work may not often be accessed or read by people with increasingly busy lives or, worse still, those who *would* be interested in this work may never have any knowledge of its existence. With this in mind, we have endeavoured to present the authors’ doctoral research in a format that is readily available and showcases recent work in the area of giftedness and talent. In an era of limited official support for gifted education in Australia and New Zealand, it seems fitting to acknowledge some of the valuable work that many are contributing to this field. It is promising to note a recent upsurge in doctoral theses in this field where, internationally, there has not been a tradition of robust, quality-assured research. Each one of the in-depth studies presented in this book has been defended before and examined by a panel of expert peer reviewers.

### 1.2 Structure of the Book

Initially, we attempted to arrange the chapters in this book according to themes. However, it became apparent that ordering chapters in this way would potentially ‘mask’ the uniqueness and diversity of each of the studies reported here. Consequently, we decided it was best to simply place the authors’ work alphabetically, to showcase each chapter’s distinctiveness and allow them to stand on their own.

This book includes 14 overview chapters of doctoral research carried out between 2010 and 2015 by Australian and New Zealand researchers. The chapters represent a range of specific issues related to giftedness and talent, and a variety of contexts. Many of the chapters focus on gifted children and young people, and a number include specific implications for those working in gifted and talented education. The perspectives of chapter authors are largely soci-

Nadine Ballam (✉)  
University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand  
email: [nadine.ballam@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:nadine.ballam@waikato.ac.nz)

Roger Moltzen (✉)  
University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand  
email: [roger.moltzen@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:roger.moltzen@waikato.ac.nz)

ocultural, acknowledging the role of both intrapersonal and environmental factors in the development of giftedness and talent.

### ***1.2.1 Overview of Chapters***

The identification of and provisions for under-served and under-represented gifted populations remains a challenge. Ballam (Chapter 2) opens this book with her research related to gifted New Zealand young people from low socio-economic backgrounds, with a particular focus on risk and resilience processes among this group. Continuing increases in child poverty have implications for the number of gifted children and young people who might be underachieving or facing difficulties associated with their personal and home lives.

Bannister-Tyrrell's research (Chapter 3) turns the spotlight on talented Australian readers, a group of gifted learners who are at risk of remaining unchallenged in the wake of expectations that educators focus on raising the achievement of students who are struggling in this area. This author outlines the role that critical literacy can play in challenging talented readers and addressing higher order cognitive functions.

For gifted and talented individuals, identity and the understanding of who one is can be elusive as they grapple with the intricacies that come with giftedness. Dillon (Chapter 4) tackled this issue in her research related to the self-formation of gifted Australian adolescents. This chapter reports on a study that allowed gifted young people to explore who they are and who they might become, an endeavour that can be a challenging process, including for those who are gifted.

Parents can require as much support as their gifted children and Free (Chapter 5) set out to uncover the unique challenges encountered by parents in the western region of Melbourne, Australia. As part of her research project, this author established a support group, which was successful in addressing the needs of parents of gifted children and young people. Free recommends that further support groups be established, particularly given the diverse experiences of both fathers and mothers in caring for their gifted children.

The transition of gifted children from pre-school to primary school settings was the focus of Masters' research (Chapter 6). The perspectives of children, their parents, pre-school and primary school teachers were gleaned in an effort to investigate the gifted child in context during this educational transition. Despite efforts to provide consistency in a child's transition experience, there remain some pedagogical differences between pre-school and school contexts. Masters makes recommendations for policy-makers, educators and parents based on her findings.

Miller's (Chapter 7) experience as a Principal and Dean in both primary and secondary schools in New Zealand was the impetus for his research with gifted and talented Māori and Pasifika adolescent boys. These young people are consistently under-represented in gifted and talented programmes in schools.

Miller's research explored the complex interaction between these boys' intrapersonal characteristics and their home environments to determine what elements might contribute to academic success.

Debate continues about how gifted learners should be provided for, and schools in New Zealand take a range of approaches. Niederer (Chapter 8) examined the experiences of gifted learners attending a gifted class one day a week. Marsh's (1987) 'big fish little pond effect' provided a basis for exploring changes in these young people's self-concepts, and these changes were considered in relation to their approaches to learning.

Tapper (Chapter 9) explored the school experiences of gifted adolescents in New Zealand. Her investigation reinforced the critical influence of culture and context on understandings about giftedness and talent. The concept of potential emerged as an interesting phenomenon, prompting discussion of this in relation to gifted underachievement. This chapter also presents a model developed by Tapper that depicts a series of identity profiles based on the experiences of the gifted adolescents in this study.

Spirituality could well be one of the most difficult elements of giftedness to observe or measure. Walton (Chapter 10) bravely explores the spirituality of gifted and talented Australian adolescents, and its variance across domains of giftedness. This chapter prompts questions about the construct of spirituality, its place in the lives of gifted young people and implications for educational approaches.

Wardman (Chapter 11) confronted the contentious topic of full-year acceleration as a strategy for meeting the needs of gifted and talented learners in her research. This chapter reports on the perceptions of New Zealand educators and pre-service teachers in regards to full-year acceleration, based on findings from one part of her doctoral research. The perceptions pertained to academic, social, emotional and leadership benefits or challenges that might be experienced by gifted learners who are accelerated through a full-year of their schooling.

The themes of identity and under-represented gifted learners are highlighted again in Webber's (Chapter 12) research related to the role of racial-ethnic identity in the engagement of culturally diverse gifted New Zealand adolescents. In this chapter, Webber identifies the coping strategies used by these gifted young people as they negotiated their way through educational experiences. The stories of these gifted adolescents provided insight into educational engagement and performance, peer relationships, resilience, and racial-ethnic identity that could potentially be relevant to other culturally diverse learners.

Williams (Chapter 13) explored the perceptions of gifted Australian school leavers, their parents and their teachers on the development of academic talent. In this chapter, she reports on some of the processes employed by gifted learners and presents a model for enhanced learning. Williams also features models based on her research that depict support mechanisms in the school and home contexts, along with a useful conceptual framework for supporting learning.

Popular culture and its influence on the development of talent in gifted Australian adolescent girls in a rural setting was the focus of Wood's (Chapter 14) research. Identity featured as a key element once again, in relation to both the participants' adolescence and their giftedness. In her chapter, Wood highlights the intersection of giftedness, rurality and adolescence with popular culture and how this supports or disrupts talent development.

In the final chapter of this book, Wormald (Chapter 15) outlines her research into barriers to the identification of Australian gifted children with learning difficulties, yet another group who are under-represented in gifted programmes. Often referred to as twice-exceptional (2E), it is not uncommon for these children's learning difficulties to mask their giftedness. Wormald's research adds to the limited literature related to the educational experiences of twice-exceptional children and young people in Australasia.

### **1.3 Using This Book**

This book represents a range of recent work related to giftedness and talent, and is designed for readers to visit particular chapters of interest or read it in its entirety. While the research presented in this book is diverse and varied, we acknowledge that these studies sit within a much broader context of issues and considerations around giftedness and talent. In light of this, we encourage readers to contemplate the implications of the research reported here for their own contexts, and the issues and challenges they might face.

We are grateful for the contributions of the chapter authors who have willingly shared their work in this volume. While there is much yet to be explored about giftedness and talent, we hope that this book will encourage and inspire others to probe, examine and critique in their quest to advocate and cater for gifted and talented individuals in the most effective ways. Sternberg (2004) states, "The way we conceptualise giftedness greatly influences who will have greater and lesser opportunities to contribute to future society" (p. xxv). We are confident that this book will play some part in empowering those who live and work with gifted and talented children, young people and adults and, consequently, gifted individuals themselves.

### **References**

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