# Learners and Knowers

Research has shown that gifted and talented children have high expectations of learning when they enter prep grade (Whitton2005). However, depending on the availability of opportunities for stimulating learning, gifted and talented children may adopt one of two attitudes to school learning (Kerr 2000).

The first attitude is developed when children find school learning stimulating and satisfying, and allows the child to understand that they are at school to be a ‘learner’.

The second attitude is one of being a ‘knower’, which develops when all the curriculum ever requires from them, is to show learning they have already achieved because of their advanced intellectual ability.

The first attitude will provide the gifted and talented child with an appropriate understanding that school is about learning and their educator is a partner in achieving further learning.

However, when a child understands school is only about showing what you already know, there is a natural limit to how long this attitude will support satisfactory ongoing learning. Some children in the second group can reach the upper levels of primary school or beginning high school, before they are faced with having to apply themselves to new learning. By that stage they may no longer be able to ‘learn how to learn’ in school without a lot of support and guidance from an understanding educator.

When a gifted and talented child finds themselves in a situation where they are not able to respond to the challenge of learning that is difficult, requiring a level of concentration and persistence not previously required at school, their sense of self as a capable leaner can be seriously affected.

As a result such gifted and talented children may appear to have lost their early potential, and/or mask their difficulties in poor behaviours that have the effect of diverting attention from their failure to achieve at school.

To ensure that children become ‘learners’ and not just ‘knowers’ at school it is important that from the very earliest days, learning opportunities are at a level that responds to the child’s current levels of learning. It is essential that some part of the program every day offers a child new learning or new skills.

(Adapted from a lecture by Barbara Kerr (2000) - Center for Gifted Education - The College of William and Mary, USA ).