This is the published version (version of record) of:


Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30018366

Reproduced with kind permission of the copyright owner.

Copyright: 2008, Australian Association for Research in Education
Introduction

This paper examines the perspectives of primary school teachers, administrators and personnel working in a middle-class eastern suburban Melbourne school as they consider the rationale for, and the purposes of, gifted education programs within the broader landscape of teachers’ work. The data for this presentation are drawn from a single case qualitative case study\(^\text{iv}\) where semi-structured interviews were held four years after the school participated in the Bright Futures gifted professional development program in the late 1990s. A [single case] case study approach was selected because it allowed for an holistic focus with attention on a particular group of teachers as they explained how, from
their personal perspectives; they dealt with specific problems (Shaw 1978; Stark & Torrance 2005). Stake (2000) differentiates between an intrinsic and an instrumental single-case study approach. This case study may be characterised as intrinsic, as my primary concern is ‘understanding what is important about the case in its own world’ Stake (2000, p. 439), as opposed to an instrumental case study, in which the researcher seeks to draw from the case study material to support or develop a generalised theory.

I develop an analysis of the context of teachers’ work and professional development by drawing upon the Foucauldian concepts of power and “regimes of truth”. In particular, I explore the possibilities afforded by this framework for examining curriculum discourses and practices associated with an outcomes-based curriculum and the implications of these curriculum models for the education of gifted students in one Melbourne primary school, Atlas Primary School (APS). This discussion paper has been developed from part of a larger study of gifted education in Victoria and it is only possible here to signal some of the emerging themes and aspects of teachers’ professional knowledge.

In keeping with a Foucauldian genealogical focus, I begin with a brief account of the wider educational and curriculum reform context taking place in the mid 1990s in Australia. This provides a mapping of the “conditions of possibility” framing the circumstances that enabled or constrained the activities and attitudes of teachers, and sets out a critique of the dominant discursive practices effected as exercises of power. This paper is thus an attempt to place in perspective the diverse educational influences upon professional practice within Atlas Primary School, and is grounded in the specific time, politics and policies of Victorian education. I then proceed to discuss teachers’ attitudes and work practices and their implications for gifted programs in this school.

A Foucauldian genealogy focuses on understanding how the present came to be, which is described by Foucault (1980) as ‘the combined product of erudite knowledge and a popular knowledge’ (p. 83). A genealogical approach is not only useful for understanding the past, but as Green (2003) posits, might even suggest that current practice has not necessarily progressed to a ‘more enlightened position’ (p. 124). In this case, a genealogical investigation could show that other ways of imagining and enacting “gifted education” might be possible. In other words, one of the tasks of genealogy is to show how the present is not the “inevitable” outcome of the past, but rather that the present arises from the intersection of contingent events. The aim of a genealogical investigation is thus to identify and examine the different factors, discourses, influences and activities and so on that shape the present and which also make it feel “inevitable” and common sense (Foucault, 1984).

**Policy and rhetoric: mapping the context**

1995 was a significant year for educational policy reform in the Australian state of Victoria. An outcomes-based curriculum model supported by an accompanying test for all children in years three and five was mandated for use in all State Government controlled schools. Victoria also gained its first, and to date, only formal gifted education policy. Such convergence was not the result of happenstance. By 1985 the social-
democratic legacy of the Karmel Report (1972), which had provided a sweeping set of recommendations for social reform which were coherent with the ideals of the then Federal Labor Government in power at the time, was waning in favour of economic rationalism, and this was accompanied by a trend for greater public accountability in education (Kenway, 1990). Victoria, under the auspices of the reformist New Right State Government of Premier Jeffrey Kennett, ‘experienced a particularly vigorous form of economic fundamentalism between 1992 and 1999’ (Seddon, 2004 p. 1). This era of New Right ideology, not unique to Victoria or Australia (see, for example, Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999; Seddon, 2004), became one where structural educational change was systematised by the driving force of politicians informed by agendas from the business and advertising worlds. During the 1980s, curriculum, assessment, standards, teachers, educational policymakers, teachers’ unions and funding to State schools had increasingly come under critique, particularly in the print media allied with the New Right (see Kenway, 1990), plus a redistribution of power was now underway in schools. Pascoe and Pascoe (1998) write that the Victorian Government ‘developed a comprehensive communications and feed back strategy focused on key allies (principals) and the general public’ (p. x). Thus the authority devolved to principals, along with the sway of parents as consumers, was boosted in comparison with the diminishing influence of teachers who, as a body, became secondary to the systemic educational and curriculum reform now underway.

Central to the Victorian Government’s sweeping educational reforms was the introduction of the Schools of the Future (SoF) program. This devolved State responsibility to individual schools for fiscal and personnel management, school charters, computerised administrative systems and assessment of school performance through a framework of centralised accountability and standards (Pascoe & Pascoe, 1998; Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, 1999). The Schools of the Future initiative can be understood in Foucauldian terms as an ‘architecture that would operate to transform individuals to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct’ (Foucault 1977, p. 172). Comprising four frameworks, the SoF would accept responsibility for resources (salary and operating costs), accountability (the school charter, the annual report and the triennial review), curriculum and personnel functions (staff selection, the Professional Recognition Program (PRP) and professional development) (Pascoe & Pascoe 1998). Thus, whilst principals and school councils were given greater authority and power over fiscal management and staffing matters, the SoF program was also a vehicle for regulating teachers’ conduct and professional work. Such a practice is what Hartley (1993, as cited in Smyth & Dow, 1998 p. 292), termed a ‘sleight of hand’, for schools, although self-managing, would remain under “the gaze of the state”. Far from relinquishing power, the state would maintain its disciplinary regime using the regulating mechanisms of curriculum normalisation (in this case, an outcomes-based model) and the surveillance of teachers and students by means of reviews and testing, all shaped, monitored and enforced by the principal-class who, in turn, were subject to the gaze of performance evaluations.
Curriculum Standards Framework and outcomes-based education

Based upon the discarded national frameworks instigated in 1988, the Victorian Curriculum Standards Framework (CSF) was designed as the skeletal structure upon which to create curriculum for individual learning needs (BoS 1995). The CSF enshrined the principles of outcomes-based education (OBE). As Berlach (2004) observes ‘[B]ecause of its amorphous and nebulous nature, OBE is not easily definable’ (p. 3), but it is an educational approach emphasising specific, measurable goals that focus learning and teaching towards attaining pre-determined and uniform outcomes. Students must successfully demonstrate competencies at the end of a teaching and learning period to determine whether an outcome has been achieved (see Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA], 2004). Although some Atlas Primary School teachers perceived an outcomes-based model as ‘good for accountability’ (field notes) and for keeping teachers on task (field notes) others viewed the introduction of the CSF with its outcomes emphasis as deflecting the focus of teaching and learning away from the needs of children, thus not only compromising the educational development of the students (2/44; field notes), but negating teachers’ individuality (11/54). Simultaneously with the CSF, testing was introduced for all year three and five students. The test, known as the Learning Assessment Profile (LAP), examined literacy and numeracy with Science or Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) in alternate years and was based on the standards of the CSF (Pascoe & Pascoe, 1998; Yates & Leder, 1996). Through these tests, the CSF standards and the levels of achievement were made public, and, the professional concerns of teaching moved beyond the endeavours of individual schools. The so-called “objective” results of the LAP not only provided feedback to parents thereby by passing teachers, but also became a means of comparing schools’ performance, a process which Pascoe and Pascoe (1998), conclude ‘became another instrument of accountability when added to school charters’ (p. 7). The norms and practices associated with an outcomes-based model became the dominant “official” regime of truth about curriculum and student learning, even if it was informally resisted among teachers. According to this regime, students, in whose education parents now had a greater voice, had to demonstrate an improved academic performance ‘for the sake of the school if not for themselves’ (Arnot et al., 1999 p. 155). Lingard (2007 p. 256), states that ‘[P]articular testing regimes can thin out pedagogies, denying the achievement of higher order goals’ which echoes the sentiment of an APS teacher who felt that the CSF ‘locks our teaching into a fit with testing and reporting’ (field notes). Whilst the LAP quantified knowledge acquisition, the CSF only required an outcome to be demonstrated without any differentiation of standard, acquisition or quality and as Berlach (2004) notes, teachers became adept at manipulating class activities to address more outcome than one outcome statement.

Thus, teachers and schools across the state experienced the contradictions and tensions between the processes of decentralisation, self management and personal educational commitments in tandem with centralised accountability and standards. It was a process of educational restructuring that Lingard, Hayes and Mills (1999) believe was ‘done to, rather than with teachers’ (p. 7; emphasis in original). The CSF was governed, in Foucauldian terms, by a particular regime of truth which eventually became normalised as the dominant “commonsense” regulating the types of professional development
sympathetic to OBE which, in turn, governs how teachers both construct and do their work. The choice of an OBE model for schools in Victoria during the instrumentalist and rationalist Kennett Government years (1992-1999) is not so surprising, considering that this was period that saw ‘a nexus between educational and economic objectives’ (Smyth & Dow 1998 p. 295). As an OBE can also be viewed as a non-differentiating curriculum approach situated within ‘the context of socialist policy-making, where equity goals are explicit’ (Hargreaves & Moore, 2000 p. 27), it is a seeming contradiction that simultaneously, the Bright Futures gifted policy was also introduced Victorian schools; a policy that sought to ‘recognise, identify and support gifted students’ (Directorate of School Education [DSE], 1995a n. p.), and as such arguably represented an attempt to differentiate curriculum.

**Bright Futures**

In May 1995, at the first Australasian International Conference on the Education of Gifted Students held in Melbourne, the Victorian State Minister for Education, Phil Gude, launched the Government’s Bright Futures policy statement on the education of gifted students in State Government schools. This was the first, and to date, only period (1995-1999), during which Victoria had a formal policy supporting the education of gifted students. It stated that, ‘[I]t is the policy of the Victorian Government that ALL students be given the opportunity to achieve their full potential. This policy makes a commitment to providing gifted students with a fulfilling and challenging education commensurate with their abilities’ (DSE, 1995a n. p.; emphasis in original). However, I argue that the Bright Futures policy is a broad, general philosophical statement rather than a formal policy for the education of gifted students, and that its very wording reflects the pervading tenacity of a particular form of educational egalitarianism\(^1\), which is described by Gross (2004), as an Australian characteristic detrimental to the education of the gifted. As a teacher, I support the philosophy of egalitarianism in the sense that the ubiquity of educational provision is the key to equality of opportunity for our students; however, when the concept of egalitarianism is used to tone down any programs seen to offer support for special groups of children or “elites”, the danger arises that a “lowest common denominator” approach to educational outcomes might result. The imprecise language of the Bright Futures policy and its “broad brush” approach provided within the published Bright Futures material, appears to show that its creators were well aware of the social rather than educational debates that would inevitably occur in making provision for the education of gifted children, seen by so many in Australia as special groups or elites “‘unfairly’ endowed with high intellectual or academic potential” (Gross, 1999 p. 93). Hence, the Bright Futures policy soft pedals around gifted educational provision and so mitigates against the very group of students for which it was designed to offer support. In 1983, The Honourable Kim Beazley (snr.),\(^2\) a senior Australian Federal Government Minister, attempted to clarify the meaning of elitism, describing it as ‘a word properly applied to the aristocratic and economic privilege, not to the recognition of special abilities or the respect due to a child in school’ (p. 12) … and that the word is imbued with a power that ‘may lead to a refusal to see that schools and classrooms need to adjust to meet the needs and special problems of all children’ (p. 14) (see also Gross, 1999).
The problem therefore, is that the term “elite”, infused with a pejorative meaning, has cast its shadow over the very real need for gifted education.

Elsewhere, the DSE described that the policy ‘has been developed within the context of a number of policy initiatives designed to significantly enhance students’ opportunities to achieve their full potential within the Schools of the Future philosophy’ (DSE, 1995b p. 2). As such, although the “context” for the policy initiatives is not spelt out in the implementation document, the education department is not reticent in declaring that its gifted policy is contained within the Schools of the Future philosophy, a discourse advocating what Lingard et al. (1999, p. 5) call ‘[T]he market view of school-based management’ whereby student outcomes are to be improved by the cut and thrust of competition between schools for “clients” and “consumers” of education with principals now in the role of hard selling education. For principals, their new Janiform role of marketing-manager and professional educator, created a distance and tensions between themselves and their teachers (Lingard et al., 1999). Primary school teachers were now dealing with not only their daily professional concerns, but learning to work within the new common curriculum, overlaid with the Bright Futures policy. Further, the results of their work would be partially assessed by the LAP which would ‘provide important information about the achievement of gifted primary students’ (DSE, 1995b p. 2), and I argue; politically marketable credibility. Teachers then were working in a highly charged professional environment, in which there had been significant reform to curriculum, and they were under increasing pressure – and public scrutiny- to improve student achievement. This was an important part of the climate and the “conditions of possibility” in which teachers approached the Bright Futures policy and associated professional development

The Curriculum Standards Framework, in terms of being a vehicle for delivering the Bright Futures gifted policy, theoretically ‘allows students to progress vertically at their optimum individual pace, irrespective of age or year levels (DSE, 1995b, p. 2). Gifted students would benefit because ‘[T]he CSF levels clearly support individual learning pathways. Gifted students may move through CSF levels at a faster rate … The achievement of learning outcomes by the gifted student will vary, both from other students in the classroom and from other gifted students (DoE, 1998, p. 3). With the exceptions of a limited number of schools offering a gifted program, such as University High School, a state government funded, but selective-entry Melbourne secondary school, Victorian state schools were organised heterogeneously where students classified according to age rather than ability were promoted within a lock-step structure and teachers taught to the level of the average student, despite the DSE recognising that age groupings might not be the most appropriate approach for addressing the learning needs of gifted students. The DSE proposed that an “ungrading” pilot project (Victorian First Steps) for primary schools and vertical timetabling for secondary students (DSE, 1995b, p. 2 would examine alternative approaches.

As indicated by the DSE (1995b p. 2), ‘[C]ourse advice will assist schools as they work to implement the CSF by providing teachers with exemplary mainstream learning activities, a comprehensive resource list and a wide range of assessment ideas. These will
be clearly linked to the outcomes at each level within the CSF, but the onus was clearly on the teacher to provide a differentiated curriculum and individual learning pathways as required for students of all abilities. To assist teachers with gifted students, an annotated section of the CSF provided examples of suitable learning “activities” (DSE, 1995b, p. 2). I emphasise the word “activities”, as proponents of gifted education are adamant that providing “activities” and/or “programs” such as the Future Problem Solving program, the Tournament of Minds and Maths Olympiad competitions, whilst useful, are forms of extension and enrichment and do not adequately replace a curriculum suitable for gifted students (see, for example, Senate, 2001 3.46-3.67; Wilson, 1996). It seems incongruous, that a New Right Government, bent on addressing the so-called declining standards of education, did not provide a specific curriculum for gifted students within its gifted policy, rather leaving it to the now beleaguered classroom teachers to address the issue with simplistic “serving suggestions” within the CSF. It is also ironic that the teachers, who were the scapegoats for past deficiencies within the education system, were now to become the vectors for its improvement. Such a practice exemplifies the contradictions that arose in this particular climate; that is, between government rhetoric and the possibilities for teacher practice, whereby the disjunctions between policy ideals and rhetoric clashed with the working reality of everyday teaching practice, particularly within the specific foci required of an OBE curriculum model. As one teacher of APS said about the CSF, ‘[T]here is an enormous amount of information to take on board to gain the understanding required prior to teaching [but] there is no time to come to grips with anything other than what you do at the moment’ (field notes).

**Bright Futures professional development**

Having described some of the wider policy and political context in which professional development for gifted education could take place, I now turn to consider the micro-political world of Atlas Primary School where these policy reforms and curriculum debates were played out. In this particular example, we can see how issues of power and resistance were mobilised and how certain regimes of truth, such as those represented by outcomes-based curriculum and a somewhat confused view of educational egalitarianism, influenced the enactment of gifted education policies and programs.

By 1997, the Department of Education had instigated a “top down” professional development program linked to the Bright Futures policy. General Managers announced to the principals of all Government schools the ‘commencement of a comprehensive Professional Development program for school leadership teams’ (Hausler, 1997, p. 1). This sought both to promote an awareness of the needs of highly able students and then be able to develop, modify and implement curricula in primary and secondary schools which addressed the needs of ‘students whose characteristics require extension, enrichment and/or acceleration’ (Hausler, 1997, p. 2). A “train-the-trainer” professional development model was adopted with facilitators training key personnel such as educators of the gifted students, network coordinators, Regional Principal Consultants and Principal class teachers, who in turn inducted school personnel (Reynen, 1998). In 1998, 29 of the 33 APS staff (including the Principal and Assistant Principal) participated in the Bright Futures Professional Development program (BFPD). I was a Phase One
facilitator and a then staff member. The Principal expressed his gratitude to me in the Staff Notices (APS, 1998) stating that by conducting an ‘in-house’ whole school Professional Development (PD) program, I had saved the school $195 per participant which was ‘[A] great asset and saving’ (p. 2). No comment, however, was passed about the benefits or otherwise regarding the implications of the BFPD for the students, the school or teacher praxis; budgetary concerns were paramount. Such an emphasis on cost savings seems to indicate that the principal had naturalised education as efficient financial management to the extent that overriding financial concerns meant a failure to engage with the challenge of gifted education. As others have written (see for example, Nicely, Small & Furman, 1980; Parker, 1993), the attitude of the principal is critical for a school’s acceptance or otherwise of gifted education and the principal should actively ascertain and act upon teacher attitudes towards gifted students and programs, thus providing responsible leadership for policy implementation and changes in teaching and learning.

There was, at Atlas Primary School, some existing interest in developing programs for highly able students. In response to the new Bright Futures policy, but prior to the BFPD, APS introduced what it called the “Challenges and Opportunity Program” (C&O), a withdrawal program which sought to address the needs of students at both ends of the learning spectrum.xiii Just which category of student was being addressed by either term was not clearly articulated. Despite the new State policy on the education for gifted children, the APS approach was cautious and conservative. It reflected a deliberate commitment to the notion of equal opportunity by its determination to not be seen as singling out the gifted for special attention without providing a compensatory program for students requiring support. Therefore, APS maintained its egalitarian credentials.

But what did the Bright Futures policy for the education of gifted children and the associated professional development mean for the teachers themselves and ultimately, their own classroom practice? Twenty three teachers completed the course; four teachers partially completed the modules; four teachers refrained from participating, even though the first sessions were conducted on a designated student free curriculum day and, the Principal himself did not stay for the entirety of each session. Each participant, by exhibiting particular behaviours compliant or otherwise, could be seen as functioning within the micro-political mechanisms operating at APS in reaction to the gifted policy directives, the BFPD and perhaps, PD in general. The non or partial participants could be viewed as embodying resistances, ‘formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised’ (Foucault 1980, p. 142).xiv Foucault insisted that regardless of its intentions, all acts of power require and generate resistance. Without resistance, all power loses effectiveness or disappears rather than achieving what it intends or asserts (see Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2002; Roth, 1992). Interview responses by APS teachers concerning PD ranged from resigned to ambivalent to accepting and enthusiastic. Tamsin said that “top down” PD ‘can be a difficulty’ and that ‘it’s partially wasted but in a way it does give a forced insight into something which must broaden your base’ (9/56; her emphasis). The Principal opined that ‘not all top down models work’ because of teacher resistance although ‘we had some teachers on at this school who had enthusiasm and ability [for PD] to drive that change’ (12/64). Others felt that PD ‘run after school is difficult’ (2/44),
or that they ‘don’t mind it’ (3/43) because it is ‘helpful at the time’ (15/64); so ‘we should embrace it’ (4/49); ‘it’s great’ (6/30; 10/39) and that ‘it’s really important’ (7/27). The DoE educational psychologist assigned to a pool of schools including APS, was ‘disgusted that I had to pay for it’ (8/51) as, unable to attend the APS “in-house” PD she had to self-fund attendance at another school venue.

Some teachers at APS accepted the top down initiatives within the OBE framework as a normal and natural approach. For example, Jeff thinks that ‘it’s legitimate for people to say “top down” and to say you have got to teach this and I think if the Government doesn’t do that then, or the powers that be don’t do that then I think they’re not going to be very popular’ (1/48). The Assistant Principal expressed her surprise at ‘how few people have what I consider to be a sound understanding of government initiatives – even initiatives that they’ve put in their classrooms’ (5/55) adopting what Edwards (2000, p. 3) calls the ‘colonial view of teachers’ by viewing her fellow teachers as ignorant even if they are not change resistant.

Everyone involved in the BFPD was ‘concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions’ (Foucault, 1980 p. 96). In the micro-political climate of APS, the school community working within the CSF and the Bright Futures is ordered and arranged into a “docile body” produced by the technology of power that is the education department. Within this inscription of power, I include both my self as the BFPD facilitator and the Eastern Metropolitan Region Curriculum Co-coordinator who assisted with the initial curriculum day.

In Foucauldian terms, power suffuses the enactment of curriculum as well as professional development, and power/knowledge relations fuels both educational and social conduct. The conduct of professional development for gifted education is no exception as relations of power and knowledge are both inseparable and integral to teachers “working knowledge”. According to Foucault, relations of power are not fixed and located in one place. Rather, power is a relatively fluid relational functioning with various points and inscriptions moving from and between the education department, regional offices, the principal, his staff and facilitating teachers such as myself enacting the new gifted policy.

An “everyday” event such as a PD program, in this instance the BFPD, encapsulates the relations of micro-power and micro-politics functioning within the school. On the pupil free curriculum day, disciplinary observation or surveillance was maintained by marking a roll of attendance and certificates were awarded to attendees after the module was completed. Self-surveillance is enacted, ensuring PD attendance for fear of enduring the principal’s wrath. Helen found it a threat ‘to be told that I shall be writing in the newsletter that this is what we’ve learnt and this is what we’re going to do, make sure you do something in your classroom’ (4/49). But teachers’ physical attendance and ostensible completion of the BFPD does not ensure compliance either to PD or the gifted education policy. Resistance to both can be found in teachers’ behaviours and attitudes. As a BFPD facilitator, I observed teachers who wrote letters, read magazines, or even sat with their backs to me during proceedings (field notes). Helen states that ‘I’ve been to
PDs where the attitude has been horrible from the participants – they’re negative and ghastly and all the rest of it and of course everyone has their own reasons for their attitude’ (4/49).

Four years after the Bright Futures professional development, teachers reflected that it had been useful and ‘overall it was a good thing and it did make you think about it – I mean it makes you appreciate that kids can be gifted’ (16/40), but its effectiveness had been undermined by a number of factors. At a macro-level these included that no clear education department gifted policy guidelines were implemented to support school initiatives, and that a change to a Labor Government in 1999 sidelined Bright Futures 2000-2005 (DoE, 1999). At the micro-level, the Principal began to pursue another ‘directive from “Head Office”’ (11/54), in this instance the Early Years, and the operation of the C&O program was reduced to a part time position.

Accordingly, formal support for gifted students at APS was rather tenuous save for one outstanding individual whose mathematical prowess left teachers awe-struck as ‘just being with him in the room and watching his way of thinking towards maths and problem solving [was] just unbelievable’ (6/30). It was teacher observation of his mathematical precocity which led to an assessment ‘to fine tune that sort of decision making [acceleration]’ but still he was ‘put in a grade lower that he actually came out’ (5/55) for social not cognitive reasons. The selection of students for the C&O program was based on level testing and class teacher judgment and was not discussed with the C&O program co-coordinator as ‘she’s only there part time (1/48). Some teachers tempered their choices by not always selecting the student they thought best suited for the program ‘cos you’ve always got to keep this little political consideration in the back of your mind particularly like the school where we’re at [because] you get the parents coming up and saying “How come my child’s never been chosen for C&O), cos she’s gifted’’” (16/40).

In heterogeneous classrooms teachers make use of the Bloom/Gardner grid introduced at the BFPD because ‘things like that are very, very good for gifted children (2/44) (see Galitis 2007 for my understanding of how teachers use this grid at APS). And there were teachers who said ‘I don’t have any gifted kids’ (1/48; ) or ‘there certainly [are gifted girls] – they haven’t come to my attention much’ (12/63); or that ‘all children are talented’ (3/43); or reservations are held about the category of giftedness because ‘there’s a degree of suspicion about who’s delivered and the motivation for why [this] is the appropriate term for that individual’ (14/48).

In its 2002 School Charter, the school placed itself squarely within ‘a broad general curriculum … across all Curriculum Standards Framework levels [using] … A variety of teaching skills … to reflect the different learning styles of students’ (p. 1). Enrichment programs and activities across musical and sporting genres are included to pursue ‘appropriate levels of academic excellence and mastery of skills and knowledge, within the context of outcomes defined by the CSF11’ (APS, 2002-2002, p. 4). However, the brief statement that, ‘[A] program operates for gifted and talented students and students requiring support’ (APS, 2000-2002, p. 1) without any elaboration of the nature and types of offerings or activities within the program, is indicative of not only how APS has
marginalised its gifted students but utilises binary categorisations for its student population. This approach was of concern for at least one teacher who observed that ‘[O]nce you’ve labelled someone it’s very hard to change and so I tend not to want to sort of categorise people to the extent there’s no flexibility’ (13/55).

Teachers at Atlas Primary School recognise that the BFPD in some small way redressed the imbalance in professional development which they saw as favouring professional development and provision ‘for the children at the lower end of the scale’ (2/44). But such an awareness becomes difficult to implement into practice as teachers became overwhelmed when coping with ‘thirty odd children and that’s very difficult; you’ve got thirty different personalities, thirty different abilities and it’s very hard to give everyone what they need and be aware of everyone’s needs’ (2/44). It is far easier to say ‘I don’t have any gifted kids’ (1/48) or that ‘all children are talented’ (2/43) and therefore be done with the vexing (and time consuming) needs of highly capable students; a strategy that is not unique to APS (see, for example Senate, 2001; Colangelo, Assouline & Gross, 2004).

Some teachers rightly remain concerned with social justice issues but find it unsettling to reconcile their humanist values with outcomes based teaching as ‘the personal interaction is lost because of the record keeping’ (13/55). Outcomes-based education can also represent a form of micro-surveillance of both teachers’ work and students’ learning as it requires intensive checklist observations to assess the success or otherwise of achieving an outcome. That teachers feel some tensions or ambivalence in relation to gifted education by feeling committed to delivering equally to all students might well reflect the egalitarian ethos that Gross (2004) believes stymies educational provision for gifted students. One teacher tells her students beginning their schooling that ‘I’m your school mum’ (7/27) becoming the epitome of the supportive and caring teacher but perhaps to the detriment of intellectual demand (see Lingard, 2007).

In Foucauldian terms, the regime of truth which existed at APS during the period of my research could be characterised as situated within the dominant discourse of a neo-liberal government advocating OBE, surveillance by testing and investment for the future as exemplified by Victoria’s first ever gifted education policy. The Principal of APS, accepting of and naturalised by this new regime of truth, responded by embracing the Bright Futures professional development as an accountable and achievable whole school outcome, as evidenced by mandating compulsory staff attendance. Although some APS teachers found the “top down” BFPD useful, others found its gifted policy basis unsettling and contrary to their own more participatory and egalitarian beliefs regarding school governance. As such, this new neo-liberal regime of truth collided with another equally strong and deeply held regime of truth, that of egalitarianism. With respect to these observations, Foucault would say that a genealogy, focusing on how the present came to be, allows for an examination of the dominant discourse of authority and the arising tensions which impact upon both the micro-power and politics in a school such as APS, aspects of which are explored in more depth in the larger study.
Conclusion

For the purposes of this paper, I have drawn on a Foucauldian framework to illuminate how Atlas Primary School is situated in a micro-world, an institution shaped and created from a blend of earlier social justice policies, the Schools of the Future policy, an outcomes-based education as embodied in the Curriculum Standards Framework and the Bright Futures gifted policy. I have mapped the conditions of possibility that create the challenging climate in which teachers engage with or resist professional development and the education of the gifted. APS proclaims that its tradition of scholarship and excellence is situated within a friendly, caring, cooperative ethos. The CSF/OBE curriculum model is congruent with this claim, being a model focused on outcomes rather than differentiated learning needs and the facility and/or degree to which these outcomes are achieved. I propose that the CSF/OBE is a model suited to a regime of truth that is Australian educational egalitarianism which structures teachers’ work. In this paper, I have suggested that outcomes-based education feeds into and is congruent with this ethos. Within of this paper, I have attempted to draw out some of the tensions for teachers that arise when this regime collides with neo-liberal policy and forms of school governance. My research shows that despite the best intentions of many teachers, the Bright Futures policy and its associated PD had very little impact upon the contemporary landscape of teachers’ work beyond adding to their awareness of another category of students, “the gifted”. Paradoxically, this also increased teachers’ angst when they realised that the intellectual needs of gifted students are lost within the broad spectrum of mixed-ability classrooms. Although APS claims to offer a program for gifted and talented students, the non-specificity of the program, a lack of explicit curriculum options for gifted students and the emphasis placed on students who have fallen behind and require assistance leads to the conclusion that in the interests of social justice and fairness, the gifted students of APS are also in need of unambiguous educational support.

Acknowledgements

I thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful and constructive comments. I am grateful to my PhD supervisor Julie McLeod and to Jean-Jacques Pantebre for their generous guidance.

References


Atlas Primary School (1998), Staff notices, 9th June.


Hausler, M. (1997), Regional gifted professional development program, facsimile to principals of all Government schools, Eastern Metropolitan Region, Department of Education, Vic.


Shaw, K. E. (1978), ‘Understanding the curriculum: the approach through case studies’, *Curriculum Studies*, vol. 10, no1, pp. 1-17


Welch, A. (1996), Australian Education: Reform or Crisis? Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.


---

i ingridg@deakin.edu.au

ii I follow the lead of Ruth Cigman (2006), in my use of the words gifted and giftedness as they ‘will do as well as any other’ (p. 199).

iii This PhD case study research was supported by the 2005 DEST Further Studies in Gifted and Talented Education grant.

iv Pseudonyms have been utilised throughout this paper.

v See Galitis (2007; 2002) for other aspects of teachers’ professional knowledge and practice in the same location.

vi My research interest in APS was whetted by my past involvement as both a teacher (1994-1999) and as a Phase One facilitator in the Bright Futures Professional Development program.

vii Participant number/age

viii In 2001, the LAP became the Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM)

ix Despite living in a stratified society, many continue to cherish the belief that Australia is an egalitarian society, which evolved from its colonial beginnings in opposition to the entrenched class-based system of British society (see, for example, Marginson 1997; Proleg 2004; Welch 1996)

x Federal Minister of Education 1972-1975; Pro-Chancellor of Murdoch University, WA in 1983 (Andreas 1984)

xi Although the Directorate of School Education (DSE) in Victoria was re-badged in October 1992 as the Department of Education DoE), some publications continued to be attributed to the DSE.

xii Janus is the Roman two-faced god of doors

xiv I was selected by the Principal for the role of C&O teacher (1995-1999) which became the catalyst for my post graduate studies in gifted education. Initially it was a full time role but the time allocation was reduced by half in 1999 until it was terminated at the end of 2003 due to the unavailability of funding (Gifted Children Australia n. d.)

xv To my chagrin, these same teachers declined the invitation to participate in my research study.

xvi Many teachers at APS were strongly formed by humanist discourses of social justice and a broader “Australian” ethos of egalitarianism.