

**A case study of gifted education in an Australian primary
school: teacher attitudes, professional discourses and
gender**

By

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the professional knowledge and views about gifted education held by teachers working in a suburban primary school in Melbourne, Australia. Examining discourses of giftedness and intelligence, it adopts a case study approach to explore teachers' gendered understanding of these concepts four years after they undertook a program of professional development in gifted education during the late 1990s. The analysis of the case study is located in relation to historical as well as current policy and professional debates regarding the education of gifted children, and the context of broader contemporary educational reforms. During the 1990s, much educational reform in Australia, as elsewhere, was characterised by neo-liberal practices of devolution, and a greater emphasis on individual accountability that altered school management structures and directed curriculum practices towards a focus on outcomes-based education. The increasing scrutiny of teaching and learning became normalised as both teachers and students were regularly monitored and measured. Within the prevailing political and educational landscape, Victoria's first gifted education policy was introduced in May 1995.

The study examined how teachers negotiated educational reforms and policy initiatives during a time of significant change and translated them into their own professional common sense and working knowledge. A qualitative methodology is adopted, and the research design encompasses close analysis of teachers' narratives and content analysis of school policies and programs as well as informal and formal documentation and reports. Examination of the case study material is informed by a feminist approach and concern with practices of gender differentiation and inequality in education; the analysis is also influenced by key poststructuralist concepts of "discourses", "regimes of truth" and "normalisation" drawn from the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault.

Three main lines of analysis are developed. First, I examine current meanings of, and discourses on, gifted education and their historical antecedents. I argue that gifted education practices emanate from modernist practices and that the constructs of intelligence and giftedness were enthusiastically adopted as technological tools to regulate and classify populations. I further argue that understanding these earlier views on intelligence and the “gifted child” remains important as these continue, often unwittingly, to infiltrate and shape teachers’ attitudes and knowledge, as well as the “regimes of truth” expressed in policy and professional discourses. Second, I propose that a deeply entrenched Australian egalitarian ethos has affected teachers’ views and practices, influencing how they navigate the field of gifted education, typically characterised as an elite form of educational provision. In some cases, this produces ambivalence about the value of gifted education, leading to educational practices that are at odds with gifted educational practices recommended by research. I argue that the program of gifted professional development did not alter deeply entrenched beliefs about gifted education, with teachers claiming personal experience and working knowledge as the crux to recognising and catering for difference. Third, I examine the socially gendered dimensions of these entrenched views and their impact on highly able girls. I argue that for teachers, the norm of the gifted child is gendered. Whilst girls can be bright or clever or smart, the idealised gifted child is more likely to be male.

This thesis offers an in-depth examination of the micro-practices of one school as it strives for excellence. It contributes insights into the impact of “top-down” policy and professional development on teachers’ working knowledge and professional practice. This study shows that while the imposed educational policies and gifted education programs provided information for teachers, they did not alter teachers’ fundamental belief systems, professional knowledge or gender differentiating teaching practices.

Declaration

This is to certify that

- (i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface,
- (ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to the material used,
- (iii) the thesis is less than 100, 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Declaration	4
Acknowledgements	5
Table of Contents	6
Abbreviations and acronyms	8
Chapter One	9
Introduction.....	9
The personal	12
The research context	14
Thesis structure	17
Chapter Two.....	22
Reviewing research on intelligence, gifted education and the gifted child: debates, definitions and dilemmas.....	22
Intelligence as a recognisable attribute	24
Development of the concept of intelligence.....	25
Measuring intelligence	30
Intelligence Quotient (IQ).....	32
The eugenics movement.....	38
The concept of intelligence as multi-faceted	41
Gifted education: signifiers and efficacy	45
Identifying gifted students in Australian schools.....	56
The recognition of gifted students in Australia.....	59
School procedures for identifying the gifted and talented	62
Conclusion	64
Chapter Three	65
Methodological and conceptual frameworks.....	65
Rationale for selection of case study approach	65
Application and purpose of a case study method to the research question..	71
Criticism of case study approaches	74
The strengths and value of a case study approach	76
My role as researcher: intimacy and reflexivity.....	77
Conceptual positioning	82
Feminist methodology/method.....	85
Foucauldian positioning	88
Key Foucauldian concepts for this study	90
The research design.....	95
Conclusion	101
Chapter Four	103
Historical and political context in Australia and the State of Victoria ..	103
Education for all.....	103
Psychological knowledge and differentiating the student population.....	106
Comprehensive education and the challenges of a common form of schooling	111
The policy quest for equality.....	116
Developments and programs in Victoria, 1970s-1980s	120
Uncertain times: mixed messages	125
Educational reform in Victoria, 1990s – Schools of the Future.....	126

Outcomes-based education and the Bright Futures policy and programs..	131
Renegotiating excellence: equity and differentiation.....	136
Changing times and current directions.....	137
Conclusion	140
Chapter Five.....	142
The school context: fostering excellence for all.....	142
Atlas Primary School	144
The teacher participants	145
School image and striving for excellence	150
Legitimising the comprehensive curriculum.....	152
Teachers' work.....	157
Teachers' professional learning at Atlas Primary School.....	161
Conclusion	176
Chapter Six.....	178
The <i>Bright Futures</i> experience	178
Bright Futures Professional Development Program	179
The Challenges and Opportunities program	183
Personal beliefs and professional knowledge	192
Teachers' perceptions after Bright Futures	197
Only one gifted student at APS?	209
Conclusion	218
Chapter Seven.....	220
Whose <i>Bright Futures</i> ? Gendered dimensions of gifted education at Atlas Primary School.....	220
Gender	223
Gendered behaviours.....	225
Perceived gender differences in aptitudes and interests.....	228
Teachers' gendered conceptions of giftedness.....	241
Conclusion	246
Chapter Eight	249
Conclusion.....	249
References	259
Appendix 1: Education Department of Victoria Timeline.....	296
Appendix 2: Sample questions and prompts for interviews.....	297

Abbreviations and acronyms

AAEGT	Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AEC	Australian Education Council
AIM	Achievement Improvement Monitor
AP	Assistant Principal
APS	Atlas Primary School
BFPD	Bright Futures Professional Development
BoS	Board of Studies
CHIP	Children of High Intellectual Potential
CSC	Commonwealth Schools Commission
CSF	Curriculum and Standards Framework
CSF11	Curriculum and Standards Framework version two
DECS	Department for Education and Children's Services
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DEET	Department of Education, Employment and Training (Vic)
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training (NT)
DET	Department of Education and Training (Vic)
DoE	Department of Education
EDWA	Education Department of Western Australia
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
ETWR	Experienced Teacher With Responsibility
GCTFSSD	Gifted Children Task Force Secondary Schools Division
HSC	Higher School Certificate
ICM	Integrated Curriculum Model
KLA	Key Learning Area
LAP	Learning Assessment Profile
LT	Leading Teacher
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
PD	Professional Development
PRP	Professional Recognition Program
QLD	Queensland
SCNBEET	Schools Council, National Board of Employment, Education and Training
SEAL	Select Entry Acceleration Learning program
SHIP	Students with High Intellectual Potential
SOSE	Studies of Society and Environment
SCTP	Standards Council of the Teaching Profession Victoria
Tas	Tasmania
VAGTC	Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children
WA	Western Australia

Chapter One

Introduction

Gifted. This potent word stimulates an emotional reaction – be it positive or hostile - not only within education circles but within the broader Australian community. Arguments that the classification of children might include a category designated as “gifted” and, as a consequence, require an educational strategy commensurate with such identification have waxed and waned since first gaining credence in the United States of America in the 1920s with the work of Leta Stetter Hollingworth and Lewis M. Terman. The gifted education movement arose from 19th century positivism which sought a systematic and reasoned understanding of intelligence.

The development of a formula which provided an intelligence quotient or IQ measurement was grounded in the work of Sir Francis Galton predicated upon the notion of difference and from the observation that varying levels of intelligence could be identified and measured within the population. Thus, the larger mechanism of intelligence became the hegemonic descriptor for “the gifted” or “the talented” or, as seen in current usage, “the gifted and talented” (G&T). The intelligence movement also reflected a quest for universal rationality, as exemplified within the realm of binary thinking, that if a group is identified as gifted, then the corollary is that a group of “non-gifted” must exist as well. This overt desire by the forbears of psychological measurement to establish the existence of, and differentiate between, the intelligent and the non-intelligent via quantitative constructs, has influenced what many in Australia might consider to be an elitist desire for an education of the few – that is, the gifted. Moreover, as I argue here, this desire has often been pursued in a simplistic manner that tends to pay little heed to the historical legacy of superiority that fuelled earlier intelligence testing and also found expression in the eugenics movement.

State directors of Australian education in the mid 1920s, were aware of the then current developments in psychological theory that gave rise to the notions of varying abilities, individual differences and degrees of intelligence that

could now be statistically assessed. Although it was an educator in the state of Victoria, K. S Cunningham, who in 1928 recommended to the Victorian Department of Education¹ that special provision for gifted students should be established, the state of New South Wales (NSW) led the way in 1932. In subsequent decades, the rise of comprehensive schooling, coupled with what became the entrenched practice of student progression by age rather than academic performance, meant that interest in gifted education waned.

It took until the late 1970s for Australian Directors-General of Education to formally recognise that gifted education languished in Australia compared to other countries. Despite this rekindled awareness, the Federal Government remained focused on disadvantaged groups, and the gifted were not seen to fall within such a designation. Whilst a social-justice correction to address inequities in the provision and availability in education is commendable, my argument is that a pervasive Australian egalitarian ethos, coupled with an expectation for an “equality of outcomes” for all led in turn, to the neglect of the learning needs of the equally deserving gifted students.

However, a concurrent movement to address these needs gained ground and resulted in all Australian states and territories – with the exception of Victoria - issuing a formal policy on the education of gifted and talented students between the years 1978-1985. Victoria did not follow suit until 1995 with its *Bright Futures* gifted education policy. It is within this particular moment in the evolution of gifted education in Australia, but especially in Victoria, that I locate my thesis.

As I write, the 2008 Olympic Games have just concluded. In the years 2005-2008, the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) reportedly spent [AUD] \$42 million on Olympic programs; \$19 million on team preparation; \$14 million to gather the team in Beijing, with an extra \$78 million provided by taxpayers via the Australian Sports Commission (Sunday Age 2008), leading to a total expenditure of about [AUD] 153 million. Yet the Australian Olympic

¹ Please see Appendix 1 for the numerous titles utilised by the Victorian education department since 1985.

Committee President, John Coates, is lobbying for increased expenditure to prepare for the next Olympic Games. Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, justified the current level of Government expenditure not only because sport is ‘part of Australia’s global standing’ (Interview 2008 n. p.), but also because ‘[I]t is part of our national identity’ (Interview 2008 n. p.). Not shying away from associating Olympic participation as an elitist practice, the capillary effect of such a significant Government investment will, according to our Prime Minister, ultimately benefit ‘community level sports’ for ‘all of our kids’ because ‘the funding of elite sports’ provides a ‘great motivational opportunity for young Australian kids to strive for something higher’ (Interview 2008 n. p.).

Notwithstanding Mr. Rudd’s tenuous linkage of this substantial investment in the sporting elite with the broader community benefit, the monies invested to chase gold medals seems highly disproportionate when compared to the [AUD] 3.2 million provided in 2004/2005 by the Federal Government for gifted education (Bishop 2006).

Vituperative arguments as raised against “elitist practices” in other fields of endeavour, but particularly for gifted education, are not raised in the sporting arena - as exemplified by the expenditure for Olympic preparation from the Australian purse (Bachelard 2008; <http://results.wwww.symworld>). Yet surely viewed in terms of expenditure, the entire process is elitist. Potential excellence is nurtured through the selection process, which identifies suitable candidates according to sport-specific criteria, gifted athletes are hot-housed which might (or might not) result in the realisation of a talent deserving of a gold medal, with further subsequent accompanying accolades and even lucrative business arrangements for the successful individual. This is a form of “special treatment” that excludes the majority of the population. There is no sense of egalitarian entitlement in this particular branch of human endeavour, but questions remain unanswered when seeking enlightenment for the perplexingly persistent stigma of “elitism” in more academic or scholarly pursuits. For example, a ministerial spokesman for the Federal Arts Minister Peter Garrett recently declared that ‘ANAM (Australian National Academy of

Music) no longer represents the most efficient way of delivering support for elite classical music training' (Usher 2008, p. 3). This statement was made to justify withdrawing the [AUD] 2.64 million of Federal funding provided for advanced performance courses; again an insignificant amount compared to the money granted for elite athletic training. Usher (2008) reports that 'the academy had always to contend with the claim that it was too much of a luxury and bred exclusivity and elitism' (p. 3). This thesis is, in part, prompted by the curious paradoxical Australian phenomenon of defending an egalitarian identity, which can nonetheless accommodate the recognition of sporting achievement by an elite few, but which struggles to support giftedness in other domains.

To understand this particular research interest and focus, and before outlining the rationale and structure of this thesis, I will explain how I came to be situated in one particular location which enabled a curiosity regarding gifted education to develop into the motivation for this formal study.

The personal

Beginning with the basic feminist tenet of beginning with the self (Brewster 1988), I begin by 'mapping where I have been' (Kamler 2001, p. 7) in order to contextualise my research interest. Barbara Kamler argues that it is important for a writer to work within what one knows, but to do so in a manner allowing for a 'critical engagement with experience' (2001, p. 7). This thesis is, in part, evidence of such a critical, personal engagement, but I will refrain from producing a lengthy autobiography and instead focus upon three professional and personal critical experiences that altered the seemingly predictable rhythms of school life, resulting in relocation, change and ultimately, this thesis.

First critical experience

December 1993: I stand in a desolate, empty corridor comforting my distraught and weeping Principal. This was his emotional and (later) somewhat embarrassed response to the closure of our outer eastern Melbourne primary school; a decision made by the local chapter of one of the 249 task forces

established by the Victorian Directorate of School Education (DSE) to implement the 'Quality provision process' (Haw 1993). This was a benign and somewhat ironic title for a program which, in 1993, resulted in the closure, merger or restructuring of 160 Victorian State primary schools and nine secondary schools (Victorian Auditor-General 1999), making approximately 8000 teachers redundant (Hurley 1995). All the affected personnel were assured that 'staff of closing/merging schools definitely will have priority over all staff returning from leave' (DSE 1993a, p. 3; emphasis in original) and that 'all displaced staff ... are guaranteed: continuing employment with the DSE (DSE 1993b, p. 1), 'although priority listing forms whereby displaced staff can provide their preferences are not available yet' (DSE 1993a, p. 3). Such a message so late in both the school year and the closure process reassured no-one and caused even greater angst for those of us left prior to the summer break without a school and a teaching position.

Second critical experience

Despite the DSE's guarantees I was thrown into a collective pool of untenured and undifferentiated teachers, all vying and maneuvering for teaching positions within an open market. Only two days prior to the commencement of the 1994 school year, I received and accepted an offer commensurate with my teaching experiences and abilities at Atlas Primary School (APS). The Principal concluded the successful interview by stating that he liked what he saw and heard. Later that year, during an excursion to the Scienceworks Museum with my enthusiastic year four students, amid the clamour and excitement of the interactive exhibitions, I became conscious that although surrounded by noise, I was unable to discern individual conversations or interactions, despite my hearing aid. Rather alarmed at the prospect of being derelict in my duty-of-care, on return to school I immediately conveyed my concerns to the Principal whose face did not mask his alarm. This, I suspect was triggered less by my defect and more by his realisation that he had inadvertently employed a less than physically perfect teacher, particularly when he commented that he had never noticed the hearing device. With amazing rapidity I was placed on leave and obliged to endure some rather harrowing examinations, but eventually it was decided that 'the Medical Officer has recommended that you are fit to

continue your teaching duties' (Kelly, G. 1994, pers. comm. 29 Nov.), but unbeknownst to me, my Principal also received an addendum to this same communiqué which stated that I be restricted to working with small groups of children.

Third critical experience

This edict from the medical officer was ignored, and for the remainder of the school year I was placed back with my year four class. However, for 1995, the Principal created a full time, specialist teaching position entitled "Challenges and Opportunities" (C&O), designed as a remedial and enrichment/extension program for students in need at both ends of the learning spectrum. This position was offered to me. By so doing, the Principal addressed two criteria: my requirement to work only with small groups of students and for the school to address the needs of gifted students according to the newly devised gifted policy "*Bright Futures*", to be formally launched mid 1995 (DSE 1995a). I commenced these C&O sessions in any available nook or cranny - stairwells, detritus filled storage areas and unoccupied offices. A desire to learn more about gifted education and provision led me back to formal study and my C&O teaching eventually led to very close ties with individual students and their families. Venturing beyond the school's boundaries, I liaised with professionals interested in gifted education, not only in the State system but also those within the Catholic and Independent sectors. I regularly attended the Boroondara Gifted Network meetings eventually becoming a coordinator, and became familiar with the providers of extension and enrichment programs at the zoo, animal sanctuaries, art galleries, museums and universities. In short, I was moving outside and beyond the classroom.

The research context

This thesis evolved from my C&O work at Atlas Primary School (APS) and a simple but not easily explicable observation; that despite the numbers of boys and girls at APS being approximately equal, more boys were nominated for gifted, extension and enrichment programs than girls. My Master's research paper (Galitis 1998) examined how I, in concert with colleagues, continued to perpetuate the dominance of boys in the school's mixed gender chess club and

speculated what, if anything, could be done to remedy the situation. Despite being excited about what I had observed regarding the dynamics of our day-to-day practices, I was perplexed when not one of my colleagues, save the Principal who provided permission for the study to occur at APS, showed any interest in the issues. This aspect, in tandem with my study, triggered further questions related to the sharing of professional knowledge and the extent to which such knowledge is subsequently embedded in practice.

I also pondered how we, as teachers, contribute to the maintenance of the status quo regarding gendered identities in relation to educational performance, including how educational performance is anticipated and/or perceived by teachers in girls and boys accompanied by the notion by what it means to be gifted in light of these perceptions - especially for girls. These questions were amplified and focused by the emergence of the *Bright Futures* gifted policy, which was squarely situated within the educational reforms implemented between 1992-1997 by the Kennett Liberal Government, described by Pascoe and Pascoe (1998 p. 4) as 'a united, disciplined Government prepared for office on day one, with a long-term vision'. Questions were also provoked by my role as a facilitator of this policy (DSE 1995b), trained to induct colleagues into an awareness of gifted students and their specific educational requirements, despite the Government's commitment to an outcomes-based education. I wondered if my colleagues developed an understanding of gifted education by participating in the *Bright Futures* Professional Development (BFPD) program, or if this only served to reinforce what appeared to be deeply entrenched perceptions and practices related to gifted students, be they girls or boys. I was also curious to more fully explore the complexities of my own positioning and personal experience in an educational landscape created from a convergence of three distinct areas of interest: gifted education, teachers' perceptions of giftedness and the influence of gender constructions on educational and social practices in schools, but particularly in relation to gifted education and the new *Bright Futures* policy at APS.

An important component of the study is that I had originally occupied the role of a full time teacher and peer in the school, a role which gradually evolved

into my new position as a lecturer in undergraduate and teacher education, which included supervisory and consultancy visits to the school site. These prior experiences meant that my status became one of an insider-outsider, an aspect that tempered not only our relationship, but the nature of that relationship. This had a powerful effect. It facilitated many discussions, allowing for the commencement of conversations with the ease of friends reforming an acquaintance; it resurrected roles and patterns of previous behaviours such as obeisance to my former Principal; it allowed for a mutual understanding of the pitfalls of undertaking tertiary study whilst working fulltime; it meant jockeying for position as the interview agenda was thwarted by a person who, in the manner of a skilled politician, refused to answer specific questions as I simultaneously restrained myself from sharing what I “knew” from my previous insider perspective; it created a wariness with another with whom I had shared a fairly cool professional relationship. But this latter interview also provided a space in which to alter previous (mis)conceptions and develop a new found professional respect and understanding as this participant’s particular teaching history and educational philosophies unfolded. My insider-outsider perspective meant disappointments when teachers, who I thought would be supportive of my research and therefore participate, declined to be involved and melted away; including those who were “coffee-break-vocal” airing very strong and usually dissenting opinions related to all manner of educational topics, but especially about gifted education, professional development and gender issues.

Shared experiences

This study formally commenced in 1999 (albeit as a professional coursework doctorate) and was undertaken on a part-time basis combined with full time university work. I took a period of leave in 2006 due to personal health issues. The first interviews at APS began in October 2002, concluding in January 2003. Analysis commenced with each of the interviews and with the transcription process that created “data”, meaning I entered and became lost in the labyrinth of words and thoughts. A number of key realisations began to emerge from both the interviews and the data. The most salient was that probably for the first time, participating teachers at APS had an opportunity to

speak about their work and articulate their thinking in trust and confidence, albeit guided by a semi-structured format in a relatively formal manner devised to address my purposes. These were professional and non-competitive conversations, compared to the verbal responses required of job interview questions or in-house accreditations such as for “Experienced Teacher with Responsibility” (ETWR) positions which often appear clumsy and formulaic in attempting to second-guess what might appeal to a principal or panel (Field notes). I also realised how very little we really knew of each other’s teaching history and personal philosophies of teaching and learning, even though we shared a professional location. I learnt how difficult both experienced and novice teachers found it to describe their teaching philosophies and styles, but was more taken aback at how inarticulate many teachers became as they attempted to do so. This might be because teachers grow silent and fail to develop a professional language in which to talk to each other due to the cellular nature of their work and being the sole adult in the company of children (McDonald 1986). I was also surprised that only one teacher specifically referred to educational theory. Although many of the participants mentioned professional development programs, they did not comment about what informed these programs, nor did they venture an opinion on the policies that were the basis of, and so affected, their chosen profession. During our conversations, “The World of Teachers’ Work” became the largest category – despite my best efforts to guide the discussions. It appeared that the teachers welcomed a forum in which to deconstruct their work issues and divest themselves of much professional baggage, particularly in relation to their most immediate concerns and the sentiments expressed did not require a purely professional vocabulary.

Thesis structure

Having explained in this first introductory chapter the rationale, focus and principal elements that frame the basis for this thesis, I conclude with an explanation of the following chapters and how they construct the argument and purpose of this research. As this case study emerged from the world of teachers’ work, a salient point is that it is sited within a specific and situated school environment, itself informed and governed by preceding events. Thus,

gifted education, one of the major themes of this thesis in the context of general Victorian education, is contextualised within global historical perspectives. One of the final stories is the Victorian *Bright Futures* gifted policy; *Bright Futures* itself being one particular trajectory in the unfolding story of intelligence and giftedness.

Chapter Two, the Literature Review, is a critical and selective review of the extensive debates and issues that frame this study of current professional understandings and practices in gifted education. It provides an overview across international and historical dimensions of several key sets of research literature that provide a background to the present study. The chapter includes a review of primary and secondary research on intelligence theorising and its symbiotic relationship with the notion of giftedness and the eugenics movement. One overall argument of the chapter is that an historical mapping of “key concepts” and “key players” assists us to better examine and understand present practices. The chapter also documents central dilemmas and disagreements that have characterised the emergence of gifted education as a field of teacher knowledge and educational policy and practice. Thus, this review lays a foundation for the subsequent chapters, and their exploration of the contemporary legacy of historical discourses on intelligence and intellectual giftedness.

Chapter Three maps the methodological and conceptual frameworks for the study. The discussion justifies the rationale for the selected research strategies and explains the interconnections between the research question, the structure of the research and the qualitative research methodologies utilised. The discussion explains why a single-case case study approach was adopted, one that combined interview transcripts, field notes and school documents plus associated policies and programs from relevant departments of education. This approach was underpinned by a theoretical framework that draws selectively upon both Foucauldian concepts and feminist perspectives. The contribution of these concepts and perspectives to examining and understanding the single-case case study is discussed, including my subjective positioning as a researcher with teaching experience in the case-study school.

Chapter Four chronicles some of the educational concerns and policy themes that form part of a wider historical and political context for understanding the circulation of contemporary discourses and policies on gifted education. While there remains much to be done in this area, a detailed history of gifted education in Australia is beyond the scope of this chapter and the focus of the overall thesis. The discussion draws on the work of a number of historians of education and key scholars who have examined aspects of the historical development of gifted education in Australia. Several recurring themes and apparently persistent tensions can be traced which, I suggest, continue to shape the design, rationale and reception of gifted education policies and associated teacher professional development programs. I characterise these as struggles over the relationship between universalism and differentiation, and between egalitarianism and elitism. In order to set the scene for elaborating this argument, this chapter begins with a brief discussion of the establishment of educational provisions for *all* students, where the case for universal education is strongly made, alongside debates regarding education for children designated as different or in need of a different type of education. The burgeoning discipline of psychology informed Australian educators but the notion of giftedness was received with apprehension, the effects of which are manifest to the present day. I discuss how a neo-liberal government which instigated a purportedly market-driven outcomes-based form of education also recognised gifted students with Victoria's first gifted education policy; *Bright Futures*. This, in turn, necessitated professional development in order for Victorian teachers to reconceptualise classroom practices.

Building on the argument that it is imperative to ground gifted policy and analysis of gifted education in a proper historical and Australian context, Chapter Five is where I elaborate the case study site by providing an account of the school structure, and its published philosophies on student learning and teacher responsibilities to provide a context for understanding the reception of the *Bright Futures* Policy and the *Bright Futures* Professional Development (BFPD) program which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six. Whilst this case study focuses upon the professional learning related to the BFPD in

one location, similar policies and programs were enacted in State government primary schools during this period (mid 1990s). As such, detailed descriptive information contributes to illuminating the policy and professional landscape regarding student learning and the general world of teachers' work. I refer to the case study primary school as Atlas Primary School (APS).

Chapter Six progresses to an exploration of how the complexities of teaching, with often conflicting requirements, can impinge on the keen sense of obligation most teachers feel for their students and how the values of policy makers can be contradictory to those employed by the State to implement policy. Particularly, I analyse teachers' work and professional learning in relation to general professional development programs and more specifically, to the education of the gifted and the *Bright Futures* policy. I draw on extended interviews with teachers and their reflections on their work and participation in the *Bright Futures* Professional Development program.

Chapter Seven, the final thematic chapter, focuses on the gendered discourses within gifted education and practices at Atlas Primary School. I argue that schools in Australia have been sites of gendered practices since their inception, privileging boys and male teachers. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which ideologies/discourses of gender differentiation persist in the perception of the "gifted child" and how such "discursive truths" are enacted and played out in narratives and practices of teachers and managers at APS. I posit that teachers at APS sincerely believe that they are providing equality of opportunity for all students, but that school policy and practice continues to favour boys. Thus, I suggest that the school community must not be lured into complacency by normalised assumptions and behaviours related to gender to ensure that a genuine equality of opportunity prevails.

Chapter Eight, the conclusion, draws together the overall themes of the thesis. I discuss the key arguments, and indicate how these contribute to the understanding, knowledge, practice and tensions about the education of gifted children. In sum, these are that the *Bright Futures* gifted professional development introduced to teachers - perhaps for the first time - a considered examination of the construct of giftedness and the notion of a "gifted child". I

suggest that the *Bright Futures* professional learning unsettled, but did not alter, long held assumptions related to giftedness held by teachers. I put forward that although the case study school strives for excellence for all, it differentiates between girls and boys. I also indicate how this thesis has opened up further questions and areas of inquiry for historical educational research and of children considered gifted, but especially research that is distinctly Australian. I now move to critically review the literature relevant to this study.

Chapter Two

Reviewing research on intelligence, gifted education and the gifted child: debates, definitions and dilemmas

In this chapter, I review research on key debates and issues that frame this study of current professional understandings and practices in gifted education. This chapter documents the central dilemmas and disagreements that have characterised the emergence of gifted education as a field of teacher knowledge and educational policy and practice. One overall argument of the chapter is that an historical mapping of key concepts and key players assists us to better examine and understand present practices. Thus, this review lays a foundation for the subsequent chapters, and their exploration of the contemporary legacy of historical discourses on intelligence and intellectual giftedness. The chapter begins with an account of select key events in the development of the concept of intelligence and methods for its recognition and measurement. Next, this chapter reviews the links between intelligence testing, the sorting and classification of populations and the rise of eugenic thinking and associated social and educational practices. Then, this chapter elaborates upon the emergence of different models of intelligence, focusing on the most influential current models of a multi-faceted view of intelligence. Finally, this discussion moves to the emergence of “gifted” as a term that categorises a particular group within a population and the debates concerning the need for educational provision of the gifted child, with a focus on Australia and in particular the State of Victoria.

A striking feature of discussions about gifted education is the sustained attention given to devising classifications and categorisations. I argue that these definitional struggles have had, and continue to have, a significant impact on professional and lay understandings about the gifted child and what giftedness looks like. One of the most influential clusters of debate in this regard has concerned the concept and meaning of intelligence. The history of gifted education is inextricably caught up in the history of intelligence. A substantial amount of research and policy has been devoted to classifying and measuring intelligence and giftedness. Paradoxically, despite the numerous

measures, models and indices available, the difficulty, or even impossibility, of achieving consensus or a stable meaning is evident. A focus on classifying and sorting populations (into levels of intelligence, or types of giftedness, for example) seeps into policy and teachers' professional development. A key argument of this thesis is that teachers' current understandings of giftedness are embedded in, and part of, a longer history of definitional and classificatory struggles regarding intelligence and gifted children.

In order to provide a context for these definitional struggles, I begin this chapter with an overview of influential debates regarding the concept and measurement of intelligence, and their influence upon the eugenics movement and understandings of giftedness and the gifted child. It is important to reiterate that the most of the literature comes from scholars in the United States of America and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom, and that most of the Australian literature mirrors the views presented.

In the following section I note some strategic moments and significant players in the western history and development of the concepts of intelligence and giftedness. This discussion could risk rendering the history of the field into a linear sequence, rather than presenting the past, as 'a profusion of entangled events' (Foucault 1984a, p. 89). However, my aim here is to plot an historical narrative and provide an overview of the evolution of the key concepts as an attempt to elaborate both upon the complexity and impact of the field of gifted education. Further, such a discussion provides an important historical context for understanding current values and ideologies within the domain of gifted education. A warrant for such an approach has been demonstrated by several authors, with Steven Selden (2000) arguing that 'educational professionals working with gifted children need to have a deeper understanding of the complexity of the history of their field' (p. 249). The silence within the academic literature on the aetiology of giftedness has also been noted by Leslie Margolin (1994; 1993), who observed that the predominant research focus has been on the characteristics, production and support of giftedness. Since then others (Borland 2003b, 2003c, 1997; Sapon-Shevin 1994; Staiger 2004) have attempted to highlight the social construction of giftedness, but these have

been rather isolated voices. The dominant view, Margolin (1993) argues, continues 'to make the concept "gifted children" appear representative of something real, obdurate, and objective' (p. 310). Borrowing from Margolin, the following discussion draws out the assumptions underpinning notions of science and intelligence which led to the creation of gifted children as a social and educational category located within an historically specific regime of truth; it also reviews research on how these notions migrated from Europe to the United States and thence to Australia.

Intelligence as a recognisable attribute

I begin by considering the historical development of the concept of intelligence, its links with education and schooling (Margolin 1994; Snow & Yalow 1982), and the symbiotic relationship between intelligence and the development of the concept of giftedness.

Societies have long sought to identify and cultivate the most intelligent or highly able (Plucker 2001), and these designations were marked by social and gender differentiation. Formal educational practices, including rigorous examinations were part of diverse ancient cultures such as the Chinese, Greek and Hebrew (Snow & Yalow 1982). For example, it is thought that more than two thousand years ago, imperial Chinese officials tested aspiring bureaucrats for their suitability to act as functionaries within a stable and highly centralised empire (see, for example, Cavanagh 1984; Gardner 1999; Landvogt 1991; Silverman, 1995; Snow & Yalow 1982). Plato (400BCE) argued that those with the greatest ability plus a natural disposition for philosophical study should receive the best education, as the finest students would eventually rule their fellow citizens (Cavanagh 1984; Kemerling 2001; Landvogt 1991). Although Gardner (1999) writes that a curriculum of reading, writing, arithmetic, history, literature, the arts and physical fitness was available only to upper-class Athenian boys in private schools, Davis and Rimm (1994) state that Plato's Academy accepted both male and female students on the basis of their intelligence and physical stamina rather than social standing. Girls were also accepted into Roman elementary schools and some secondary schools, although further education was considered the preserve of boys, as motherhood

was the designated female vocation rather than architecture, engineering, law or administration (Colangelo & Davis 1997; Davis & Rimm 2004).

In the Middle Ages, church leaders searched for studious, shrewd and devout male students, whilst the wealthy and influential citizens of Renaissance Europe (1300-1700) rewarded their creatively gifted people with patronage and financial support (Davis & Rimm 1994). Education remained a privilege for the upper classes or the wealthy in Anglo-Celtic societies until the introduction of a free, secular and compulsory education for all children in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Senate 1988).

These brief comments indicate that various cultures have tried to recognise and nurture the human intellect. Snow and Yalow (1982) note the corollary between the development of formal education as a social institution and the belief that intelligence can be recognised and developed. They suggest that differing perspectives about intelligence determined various educational practices, but that it was only when psychology materialised as a distinct discipline from philosophy and biology that theories of intelligence and giftedness emerged (Plucker 2003; Snow & Yalow 1982). Notions of genius and giftedness, as opposed to feeble mindedness, arose from empirical studies that sought the determinants of intelligence. Many concluded that as genetic inheritance was unavoidable, selective breeding was necessary to increase the intelligence of populations (Galton 1985, 1972) – hence the contested link between intelligence testing and eugenics, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Development of the concept of intelligence

The modern history of intelligence and intelligence testing has a mixed heritage (Carroll 1982; Wiseman 1967) and is in turn connected to the rise of psychology. Wiseman (1967) observed that although the foundations of psychology were British, American research has dominated the fields of psychology and educational psychology. I believe that this is to still be the case. For example, a perusal of the *Bright Futures* Resource book - Education of gifted students 'select reference list' (DoE Victoria, 1996, pp. 78-80) shows

that 66% of the works originate in America; 24% are Australian and 3% from the UK.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the psychological world became absorbed in the notion of intelligence (Plucker 2003). However, as Carroll (1982) observes, there was considerable uncertainty about what intelligence represented and much of the debate was concerned with attempts to establish both its definition and parameters. A significant figure during this time was the British polymath Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), a younger cousin of Charles Darwin. Working within the boundaries of late 19th century science, Galton sought to identify intelligence, primarily in the male progeny of those who held leading positions in society, believing that intelligence, or a lack thereof, was both inherited and an outcome of natural selection (Galton 1985, 1972). The alleged originator of the bell shaped curve, Galton is also considered the founder of the eugenics movement having devised both the term and the expression “nature versus nurture” (Galton 1985; Plucker 2003).

The editor of the original 1865 volume of Galton’s *Hereditary Genius* notes that Galton based his genealogical investigations into genius on a handbook of 2500 American and Continental men (*Dictionary of Men of the Time*) whose professions and proficiencies constituted fifty-eight separate occupations (Galton 1972, pp. 51-52). These were divided into varying domains - agriculture, the arts, the armed forces, sciences, law, manufacture, trade and being born royal. Galton reduced these to thirteen, mostly English categories, to that of judges, peers, statesmen, commanders, literary men (although the Austen and Brontë families are included), men of science, poets, musicians, painters, divines, senior classicists of Cambridge, oarsmen and wrestlers of the North Country, so including physical prowess into the categorisation of genius. The list was further refined to ‘the more select part’ (Galton 1972, p. 51), namely those over fifty years of age and considered to be eminent rather than by repute of ‘notoriety obtained by a single act’ (Galton 1972, p. 51). Galton’s intelligence thesis is built upon, and reveals, a deeply entrenched classed and gendered bias. As Davis and Rimm (1994) note, Galton apparently overlooked the significance of the enabling circumstances in which many of his

aristocratic subjects belonged. In 1901, Galton (1985, p. 19) observed that ‘[In] each class of society there is a strong tendency to inter-marriage which produces a marked effect in the richness of brain power of the more cultured families. It produces a still more marked effect of another kind at the lowest step of the social scale’.² Thus, attention (as an investment for potential profitability) should be shown to the highest classes, he argued, as ‘the lower classes make their scores owing to their quantity and not their quality’ (Galton 1985, p. 17).

Galton also believed in a racial hierarchy within the social structure, one dominated by the white European, for ‘a modern European possesses in a much greater average share [of ability] than men of lower races’ (Galton 1972, p. 27). Although he stated otherwise, when Galton selected his group for the study of hereditary genius it was in effect an act of conscious bias (Galton 1972, p. 30). This perhaps reflected the values of his time, but they were views that nevertheless had significant repercussions for subsequent conceptions of intelligence and for the educational practices underpinned by them. Galton’s participant selection dismissed and ignored large sections of the population, most obviously women, and men from non-elite or middle class and non-white or non-European backgrounds. Thus, from its inception, the concept of intelligence, and the associated categories of genius and gifted, have been profoundly gendered, raced and classed. Further, Galton’s position that ‘the brains of the nation lie in the higher of our classes’ (Galton 1985, p. 11) provided the rationale for subsequent calls for eugenic reform.

Justifying his research with “good science”, numbers and the laws of statistical measurement, Galton (1985, 1972) sought to quantify intelligence. He is credited with devising both the concept of general intelligence as a fixed quality and for considering the means by which it might be measured to provide a global mental ability score. Many debates about the concept of

² He supports this position by citing the work of a Mr. C. Booth who purportedly wrote ‘Their [lower classes] life is the life of savages, with vicissitudes of extreme hardship and occasional excess. From them come the battered figures who slouch through the streets and play the beggar or the bully. They render no useful service, they create no wealth; more often they destroy it’ (Galton 1985, p. 19).

intelligence have turned on the question of whether a general or single form of intelligence exists or whether intelligence is multi-faceted. These debates, in turn, give rise to contention over whether individual or group differences exist, and whether education can improve intelligence. Recognising that educational theories are situated in particular historical times, with the dominance of single or multiple views on intelligence waxing and waning, Snow and Yalow (1982), nonetheless surmised that since the Socratic era, intelligence has generally been viewed as multi-faceted and educable, and that it is the degree of difference in educability which indicates differential intelligence. I suggest that whilst a unitary notion of intelligence has been held by thinkers with diverse perspectives such as Socrates, Luther and Franklin, it was Galton's theorising and highly influential viewpoint, embedded in an era of burgeoning scientific thought that seeded a particular regime of truth which in turn led to particular human practices that continue to the present in both psychology and education.

Working within the new paradigm of psychology, British researchers continued to seek a deeper understanding of intelligence. For example, in 1904, Charles Spearman (1863-1945) theorised that intelligence was composed of a general factor or intelligence known as *g*, combined with other specific factors or abilities (*S*) which are related to *g* and in combination, enable predictions concerning intellectual ability (see, for example, Carroll 1982; Piirto 1999; Plucker 2003; Young & Tyre 1992). Influenced by both Galton and Spearman, Cyril L. Burt (1883-1971), a psychologist specialising in education, viewed intelligence as a predominantly inherited trait, albeit tempered by environmental influences.³ He took an hierarchical view of intelligence with *g* at the apex of two group abilities (verbal-educational and spatial-mechanical) (Richardson 1999). A proponent of statistical analysis, Burt commenced his quest in 1926 for a national (British) testing program which eventually became known as the Eleven Plus, as he believed that intelligence became fixed at the age of eleven (Plucker 2003). The aim of the

³ Burt's reputation was sullied by allegations that he produced fraudulent data to substantiate theories related to the inheritability of intelligence and environmental influences on twins separated at birth (see, for example, Parrington 1996; Plucker 2003; Rushton, 2002).

test was to determine, then segregate, bright and intelligent students - regardless of socio-economic status - from their less able peers (Yates 1971).

In contrast to the notion of *g*, the US educationalist, Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949), held a view of intelligence as multi-variate,⁴ believing it incorporated abstract (composed of altitude or complexity); difficulty – considered the most important; width or task variance; area (a function of width and altitude plus speed); mechanical (understanding of how the physical world functioned) and social sub components (Plucker 2003). In the mid 1930s, the American psychometrician, L. L. Thurstone (1887-1955), began to apply factor analysis to the two aspects of intelligence determined by Spearman, and concluded that ‘[S]o far in our work we have not found the general factor of Spearman, but our methods do not preclude it’ (Thurstone, 1938, p. vii). Instead of *g* and *S*, he proposed that intelligence was formed by more than one primary mental ability (PMA) including verbal comprehension, word fluency, number facility, spatial visualisation, associative memory, perceptual speed and reasoning (Plucker 2003).

Thus, not all theorists accepted intelligence as a single entity, solely determined by general intelligence tests providing a single score such as the intelligence quotient (IQ) (discussed below). This range of approaches indicates the difficulties confronted by theorists in their attempts to define, classify and categorise the elusive concept of intelligence. Despite a lack of consensus regarding intelligence, assessments continued to be devised and used to ascertain differences within intelligence. As Carroll (1982) reflected, ‘the tests must have been measuring *something*’ (p. 37; his emphasis) for their reliability and validity in predicting academic performance had been recognised in both psychology and education.

However, underpinning the definitional debate was Galton's initial premise that intelligence is inherited and moderated by a largely undetermined environmental influence (Young & Tyre 1992). His theories, as noted,

⁴ Some authors (e.g., Grindler, 1985; Plucker 2003) say that Thorndike rejected *g* but others (for example, Carroll, 1982) say he expounded upon *g*.

emerged from observations of white, principally upper-class, male populations, and influenced the next generation of researchers who continued to promulgate through their own investigations, the prejudices and bias inherent within Galton's assumptions of intelligence.

Measuring intelligence

It is generally recognised that modern intelligence tests originated in France during the 1890s. Key players in these developments were Alfred Binet (1857-1911), a self taught psychologist who gained his first degree in law (Plucker 2003), and Théodore Simon (1873-1961), a medical practitioner who became Binet's doctoral student (Plucker 2003). As an aside, it is of interest to note that after acknowledging the work of Binet and Simon, most authors speak only of Binet (e.g., Colangelo & Davis 2003; Davis & Rimm 2004; Herrnstein & Murray 1996).

Binet and Simon were employed by the French Minister of Public Instruction in 1904 to construct a test to identify, remove and relocate 'defective children' (Binet & Simon 1980, p. 9) from regular classes into special educational support settings. So began what Foucault called 'a new type of supervision – both knowledge and power – over individuals who resisted disciplinary normalization' (Foucault 1995, p. 296). Influenced not only by Galton and his concept of a general intelligence, but also by test items already constructed by Parisian colleagues Blin and Damay, Binet and Simon (1980, p. 37) wrote that their 'purpose is to be able to measure the intellectual capacity of a child who is brought to us in order to know whether he [sic] is normal or retarded'.⁵ According to Young and Tyre (1992), Binet and Simon's original tests were purely diagnostic, for they considered that to actually measure and evaluate intelligence was too complex a task. Although Simon and Binet were unsure about the ultimate intent of their commission to identify sub-normal children in primary schools, they were curious about 'how far the scientific diagnosis would accord with the judgment of the teachers' and whether it would 'show them [in this way] if they deceive themselves, where they have committed errors, and what are the criteria which they should henceforth employ in order

⁵ Joan Freeman (2001) notes that it is always a "he".

to be more exact' (Binet & Simon 1980, p. 168). Indeed, it appears that Simon and Binet sensed that a discrepancy might be found between their measurements and teacher evaluation; if so, teachers would be expected to defer to the external power of scientific measurement and promulgate what the tests proved. I discuss such surveillance, power enactments and struggles from a Foucauldian perspective in Chapter Three.

Striving to quantify intelligence did not preclude qualitative approaches to understanding the concept. In 1905, Binet and Simon noted that intelligence was manifest as 'a fundamental faculty, the alteration or the lack of which, is of the utmost importance for practical life. This faculty is judgment, otherwise called good sense, practical sense, initiative, the faculty of adapting one's self to circumstances. To judge well, to comprehend, to reason well, these are essential activities of intelligence' (1980, pp. 42-43). Such an approach can clearly be seen in the contemporary thinking of Robert Sternberg (b. 1949) (1985) and Howard Gardner (b. 1943) (1993) with their emphasis on cultural context, practical applications and creative solutions in not only day-to-day problems but in all realms of human endeavour. These modern day theorists are known for their multi-variate approach to intelligence rather than advocating a single unitary measure for assessing intelligence.

Binet and Simon did not find much difference between so-called normal and dull students in their early tests, which involved the examination of hand strength, tolerance to pressure on the forehead and reaction time to sounds. Eventually, concentration spans, memory, judgement, reasoning and comprehension were included (Davis & Rimm 1994, p. 5). Authors such Wiseman (1967), consider that Binet's primary contribution to studies of intelligence was the notion of a "mental age", an idea which evolved as theory translated into practice along with the construction and implementation of assessment instruments. Teachers tested their students and then categorised them as being ahead, behind or at an appropriate intellectual stage of development for their chronological age. Those considered developmentally delayed were labelled as idiots, imbeciles or morons [sic] (Binet & Simon

1980) and intelligent children were those measurably ahead of their age peers (Davis & Rimm 1994).

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

This section discusses the development of IQ as a gauge for ascertaining intellectual giftedness and comparative degrees of giftedness. Practitioners advocating multiple intelligences and differing forms of giftedness reject IQ as the sole divination tool of high intelligence or giftedness, but nevertheless acknowledge the measurement's intended purpose. As such, an understanding of the historical developments of IQ is of fundamental importance when examining the framework of intelligence which supports the social construct and divination of giftedness, plus its related gifted education practices.

Binet's work on mental age and intelligence testing gained favour in America in the early twentieth century, but the emphasis gradually altered from identifying below average children, to using the tests with normal and above average children (Davis & Rimm 1994). Further development of Binet and Simon's work, particularly by the German psychologist Wilhelm Stern (1871-1938) in 1912, resulted in links between chronological and mental age. Although Binet was accredited with devising the concept of a "mental age", it was Stern who related test scores, mental age and chronological age to indicate the level of development (Plucker 2003). Stern devised a formula for measuring intelligence: mental age divided by chronological age x 100 = intelligence quotient or IQ (Carroll 1982; Gardner 1999; Piirto 1999). Although Plucker (2003) accredits Stern with the specific naming rights - which in German is *der Intelligenzquotient* - rather than the 'concept of IQ' (Carroll 1982, p. 34), both the Stanford Magazine (Leslie 2000) and British educational psychologist Philip E. Vernon (1960) claim that Lewis M. Terman (1877-1956), a Stanford University psychologist, both created and popularised the term "intelligence quotient". Despite debates regarding provenance, Plucker (2003) does acknowledge that Terman standardised the distribution of the scores so that the mean would always be 100 (see also Leslie 2000).

In the Western world during the 1920s, the appeal of this simple formula, in tandem with new statistical practices, gave rise to the rapid acceptance of the results of IQ testing, not only because it supposedly represented a natural order, but because of its utility as a predictable measurement tool for the analysis and categorisation of populations (Carroll 1982; Fendler & Muzaffar 2008; Kamin 1995). Consequently, eugenic principles could now be supported by quantitative means. Testing was utilised by immigration departments, the armed forces, and employers as well as educational administrators (Young & Tyre 1992), seemingly without any ethical concerns. Despite the lack of a clear definition or understanding of the term “intelligence”, it became the justification for racism and social stratification in America, Europe and Australia (Anderson 2005; Piirto 1999; Young & Tyre 1992).

Henry Goddard (1866-1957) who translated the Binet-Simon Intelligence Scales into English (1908-1910), failed to account for variables such as language in his deliberations (Piirto 1999; Young & Tyre 1992). Other factors such as race, culture and class also had a bearing on test results but these effects were not commonly acknowledged. Testers at Ellis Island (New York) resorted to pantomime to convey meaning rather than translating the tests for potential American settlers (Staples 1995). Although this scenario conjures up rather comical images, with the pantomimes more likely to have perplexed rather than enlightened non-English speakers, it had serious consequences by denying many would-be immigrants entry to the United States. Eastern and Southern Europeans and Jews (no matter the country of origin) were considered to be “feeble minded” compared to the preferred British and Northern European immigrants (Miller 1995). Cultural integration might have lessened the impact of the language variable, but racial bias regarding intelligence still occurs. For example, paediatric neurosurgeon Alexa Canady (cited in Rimm & Rimm-Kaufman 2001, p. 164) recounts that her superior IQ score was assigned to another student; Canady and her brother were the only black students in a white American school.

Galton (1972) stated in 1892 that ‘I should have especially liked to investigate the biographies of Italians and Jews, both of whom appear to be rich in

families of high intellectual breeds. Germany and America are also full of interest' (p. 47). Such a statement might lead one to assume that Galton, as the direct ancestor of the theory behind the Ellis Island exercise, would have disapproved of the aforementioned practices, but, reading further, one sees that Galton's class and socio-economic bias remained, as he dismisses the need for investigation into the French as 'the Revolution and the guillotine made sad havoc among the progeny of her able races' (Galton 1972, p. 47).

In 1906, Terman oversaw the adaptation of the Binet-Simon tests to American conditions (Kamin 1995; Plucker 2003). In his 1919 publication "The Measurement of Intelligence" (a volume of theory, instruction and tests), he stated that 'there are many grades of intelligence' (Terman 1919, p. 4), ranging over the categories of retarded, feeble-minded, normal and superior.

Unlike the current situation in Australia where IQ tests are managed by specialists, the early IQ tests were widely administered by 'the rank and file of teachers, physicians, and social workers ... in normal schools, colleges, and teachers' reading-circles' (Terman 1919, p. xi);⁶ Terman, however, qualified such universal usage by stating that only trained psychologists could provide an 'accurate diagnosis' (p. xi), thus signalling the germination of a technique of power which reinforced the creation of particular categories of people charged with ordering the population. The initial 'Stanford Revision and Extension of the Binet-Simon Intelligence Scale' (Terman 1919, n. p.) led to the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, the precursor of all American intelligence tests. Terman and Merrill (1937, p. ix) wrote that their test 'has become the standard clinical method for the evaluation of intellectual status and is used, not only in clinical practice, but also as a tool of research with a wide variety of subjects, including defectives, delinquents, the retarded, the gifted, the normal, and the psychopathic'.

⁶ This might because Goddard, one of the pioneers of intelligence testing in America, distributed 22,000 copies to American schools, thereby effecting IQ testing as an acceptable and normal school practice (Plucker 2003).

Again, the original intent of the tests was to identify and weed-out under achieving students, but these instruments also led to the classification and study of high IQ students. Using the normal distribution curve, Terman considered that approximately 1% of children fell into the categories of “superior” and one end and “feeble minded” at the other (Terman 1919, p. 12). For the children high in general intellectual ability or intelligence, Terman felt that ‘[I]t would be greatly to the advantage of such children if their superior ability were more promptly and fully recognized, and if (under proper medical supervision, of course) they were promoted as rapidly as their mental ability would warrant ... The danger in the case of such children is not over-pressure, but under-pressure’ (Terman 1919, p.16), suggesting that teaching in schools was not commensurate with individual abilities. Attention to students of superior ability was warranted because ‘genius should show the way’ (Terman 1919, p. 12) thereby advancing civilization. As Plucker (2003) summarises, Terman felt that superior children should: be identified as early as possible; be accelerated through school; have differentiated programs and instruction; that their teachers be trained accordingly; be seen as a national resource for the betterment of society but also be allowed to pursue their interests and particular talents.

Advocates for addressing the educational needs of gifted students in Australia continue to list similar imperatives, (see, for example Braggett 1985; Gross 2004; Senate 2001). Miraca Gross (2004), has extended the notion of using an IQ score to illustrate the degrees of difference within giftedness by borrowing the terminology used to assess mental deficiencies and retardation. According to Gross (2004), it is inadequate to merely identify a student as gifted; the level and type of giftedness must also be determined to ensure that curriculum and programming is educationally appropriate. This, in turn, has led to debates as to what is actually being measured and how the IQ is determined. Although there are differences between the instruments, and any consensus regarding giftedness remains elusive, there are however similarities between the different types of psychometric assessment and the language of classification used by the experts in this area as they endeavour to link intelligence and giftedness

(see Table 2.1 below; also, see Smith 2006, pp. 15-18 for a discussion on the current Wechsler and Stanford-Binet instruments).

	IQ range	Classification	Prevalence
Gross (2004 p. 7)		<i>Gifted framework</i>	
	115-129	Mildly or basically gifted	1:6 – 1:40
	130-144	Moderately gifted	1:40 – 1:1000
	145-159	Highly gifted	1:1000 – 1: 10,000
	160-179	Exceptionally gifted	1:10,000 – 1:1 million
	180+	Profoundly gifted	Fewer than 1:1 million
The Wechsler tests		<i>No gifted framework</i>	
	90- 109	Average	
	110-119	High average	
	120-129	Superior	
	130+	Very superior	
Stanford-Binet		<i>Blend</i>	
	90-109	Average	
	110-119	High average	
	120-129	Superior	
	130-144	Gifted or advanced	
	145-160	Very gifted/highly advanced	
Ruf (2005 in Smith 2006 p.17)		<i>Gifted framework</i>	
	120-124	Moderately gifted	
	125-129	Gifted	
	130-135	Highly gifted	
	136-140	Exceptionally gifted	
	141+	Exceptionally to profoundly gifted	

Table 2.1: Quantification of IQ by source (adapted from Smith 2006, pp. 15-17).

The IQ as an indicator and measure of intellectual ability remains influential for both lay and professional communities. For example, The Mensa Society (Mensa 2000) uses IQ scores for screening applicants, admitting to membership only those assessed within the top 2% of the population. But the value and use of the IQ has not gone unchallenged. The American educational psychologist, Joseph Renzulli (b1936), questions the use of such scores to describe intelligence and observes that Terman himself warned against the practice (Renzulli 1986). According to Young and Tyre (1992), test scores standardised across large populations have their uses, but are of little value when trying to make sense of intelligence, for IQ tests assess only a part of this

psychological construct. Renzulli and Reis (2003) note that IQ scores have been shown to correlate with schoolhouse giftedness or '*test-taking or lesson-learning* giftedness' (p. 185; italics in original), that is, IQ or similar tests of cognitive ability easily measure the knowledge that is valued in traditional school learning situations; but as Renzulli (n. d.) points out, a high IQ does not necessarily result in intelligent or gifted behaviour.

However, the tests, although they focus on convergent rather than divergent thinking, are considered by psychologists such as Judy Parker (1993, p. 18), 'to be the best available single instrument for identifying giftedness'. Results often determine the placement of students in acceleration programs and continue to play an important part in the process of programming for individual differences (Renzulli 1986). In addition, these methods can be appealing to practitioners who value expedience, because the tests are relatively fast, neatly packaged and defensible (see, for example, Bartlett n. d.; CHIP n. d.). Parker (1993) does acknowledge that 'economically, these tests are expensive to administer due to the time they take and their requirement of a trained psychologist' (p. 18). In other words, because of the scientific and seemingly "objective" image of the IQ tests, the results provide persuasive data to leverage support for students who may require additional or special support. Indeed, in my own work as a teacher, I have used the results of IQ tests as *one* tool for confirming my observations of school performance to assist students gain special education placement because, as a McKinsey management consultancy slogan states, 'what gets measured gets managed' (Boyle 2002, p. 43).

A key socio-political dimension regarding notions of intelligence and its measurement, either by the IQ instrument or other forms of classification, has been its relationship to social and educational selection. As stated, the eugenics movement was strongly influenced by the development of measures of intelligence and the perceived capacity to categorise the "quality" of different groups of the population, which had ramifications for many people in the Western world. Aspects of this movement are discussed in the following section.

The eugenics movement

The eugenics movement was founded by Galton with his follower Karl Pearson (1903). Arising within the context of the developing discourse of intelligence, the eugenics movement was a critical point of reference for the history of psychology, education and social history. Galton said that although he initially devised the term “stirpiculture” to describe ‘the science which deals with all influences that improve qualities of a race’ (1904, p. 1) he ‘deliberately changed it for “eugenics”’ (1904, p. 25). It was Charles Darwin, with his 1859 theory of evolution (*On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*) who, according to Melvyn Bragg (2006 p. 145), ‘gave extreme eugenicists intellectual respectability’. The language of intelligence discourse enabled eugenicists to advocate for race improvement and selective breeding to increase ‘the productivity of the best stock’ (Galton 1985, p. 24) as ‘[T]his is far more important than that of repressing the productivity of the worst (Galton 1985, p. 24), but his warning to the world that ‘[O]ver-zeal leading to hasty action would do harm,’ (Galton 1904, p. 6) was ignored by those whom Jacoby and Glauberman (1995 p. xiv), call ‘crackpots and racists’ thus realising Galton’s rather prophetic words that ‘the nation ... will gradually give practical effect to them in ways we may not wholly foresee’ (Galton 1985, p. 43). Thus the new discourses related to intelligence gave rise to the technologies that benefited certain social groups, and came to be used in ways which dominated and controlled particular populations, classes and minority groups. Yet, as Jacoby and Glauberman (1995) observe, in its nascent phase, supporters of eugenics considered themselves liberals and progressives rather than elitists and racists. This is evident in the work of feminists such as Margaret Sanger (c1879-1966) (Katz 2003) and Marie Stopes (1880-1953) (Stopes 1918) who acknowledged eugenic principles when fighting for birth control rights and the sexual enlightenment of women in the early decades of the twentieth century; but increasingly, eugenic principles were adopted as a mechanism for classifying and marginalising particular groups of the population and for elevating the desirability of others.

The benefit of historical hindsight enables present day writers (e.g., Anderson 2005, 2002; Selden 2000) to observe how the work of researchers at the turn of

the twentieth century was informed by eugenic principles. Guided by Mendelian principles,⁷ eugenicists believed that intelligence, or a lack of thereof, was innate, that is, hereditary, and that the white race was superior over all others. Inferior whites such as the lower classes or those deficient in ability were considered the result of degraded breeding, thus any social reform efforts would be ineffectual (Anderson 2005; Selden 2000). Rather than promoting Galton's desire to increase the population of those that were highly intelligent, researchers such as Terman and Goddard aspired to hinder the feeble-minded from procreating (Herrnstein & Murray 1996; Kamin 1995; Plucker 2003), and believed that the Simon-Binet scale could be adapted for the sole purpose of categorising and sorting the American population by degrees of mental prowess.

In the early 20th century, the United States of America implemented eugenic principles in both immigration policies and school curriculum (Selden 2000; Young & Tyre 1992). Selden (2000) writes that by using the traditional means of communication such as church sermons, exhibitions and fairs in tandem with the burgeoning cinema industry, the masses were informed 'that heredity was much more important in human development and improvement than was environment' (p. 242). Australia did not remain immune from the eugenic principles of white Anglo-European racial superiority. The Immigration Restriction Act 1901⁸ (Commonwealth of Australia 1901), commonly known as the White Australia Policy (see, for example, "Sydney" 1925), excluded both non-whites and Asians from Australian shores.⁹ This policy legitimised racist beliefs of a natural, racial hierarchy, with white (British) races uppermost (Bessant & Watts 2002) and the Act underscored the pervasiveness of racism in Australia, which began with English colonialisation at Sydney Cove in

⁷ Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) found 'that certain traits show up in offspring without any blending of parent characteristics' (O'Neil 2007, n. p.).

⁸ In 1973, bi-partisan amendments effectively put an end to the policy (Sammut 2005). However, it was not until the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act that it became illegal to use racial criteria for official purposes including immigration, although this was not reflected in law until 1978 when the Galbally report formalised the term 'multiculturalism' (Museum Victoria 2003).

⁹ Yet there were exceptions, such as within the pearling industry in Broome (Western Australia) or the Queensland sugar industry which employed Japanese workers. In 1911, 357 Japanese were working in Queensland and 1914 figures show 1,166 in Broome (SBS 2002).

1788. The Act required that potential immigrants pass a dictation test of fifty words, not necessarily in English, but in a European language of the immigration officer's choosing (Commonwealth of Australia 1901).

In Anderson's (2002) examination of Australian medical and scientific ideas concerning race and place, and the alleged intelligence gap between black and white coupled with the drive to either assimilate or segregate the indigenous population, it is evident that British and American theorising was the bedrock of the Australian research being undertaken in the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, McCallum (1990) notes the influence of Binet, Spearman, Burt and Thorndike among others, in teacher education courses during this same period, arguing that 'Australian researchers and teachers were heavily dependent on British and American source material' (McCallum 1990, p. 27). As noted, the efforts to determine the *g* factor for such an abstract quality as intelligence was closely entwined with the principles of eugenics and although as Piirto (1999, p. 11) notes, 'the [intelligence] theory race was on' between competing approaches and definitions, eugenic principles gradually faded from intelligence theorising. The recent literature in the field of intelligence theorising and gifted education either ignores or barely acknowledges its historical antecedent (see, for example, Colangelo & Davis 2003; Davis & Rimm 2004; Delisle 2000; Gross 2004; Herrnstein & Murray 1996, Piirto 1999; Sternberg 1982a; Young & Tyre 1992).

Whilst I document debates in the research linking intelligence testing to the eugenics movement, I place a caveat on this discussion of historical influences as I am not proposing that current advocates of gifted education consider themselves as eugenicists. Rather, I am arguing that it is important to understand the historical precursors of gifted education and, further, to consider the ways in which traces of these antecedents may remain embedded, if typically unacknowledged, in contemporary thinking about giftedness and the corresponding classification of populations. I now refocus my discussion on the notion of intelligence being more complex an entity than being able to be encapsulated by a single measure.

The concept of intelligence as multi-faceted

As previously noted, debates regarding the form and dimensions of intelligence have been conducted over millennia. In this section I attend to more relatively recent discussions to situate the recent developments of the concept of multiple intelligences.

In 1967, J. P. Guilford (1897-1988) surmised that the concept of intelligence was broader than 'one monolithic intelligence' (p. 27), with the associated restrictions imposed by intelligence tests and scales. He concurred with Edwin G. Boring's (1886-1968) sentiment 'that intelligence is what intelligence tests test' (Guilford 1967, p. 37), although there are those who view this as a rather cynical approach to understanding intelligence (for example, Paulsen 1992). Guilford initially identified 120, later revised to 150 (Sternberg 1985), separate characteristics of intellectual acts or abilities which he incorporated into a Structure of Intellect Model (Guilford 1967, 1959), classified by identified characteristics and performances (Guilford 1967; Piirto 1999; Young & Tyre 1992) and divided into three dimensions:

1. operations (cognition, memory, convergent and divergent thinking, evaluation)
2. products (units, classes, relations, systems, transformations, implications)
3. content (behavioural, semantic, symbolic, figural) (Guilford 1967 p. 63).

German born British psychologist, Hans Eysenck (1916-1997) is considered one of the most influential psychologists in recent times contributing to the many subsets of psychology (Plucker 2003). He was renowned for his prolific research output and forthright views which espoused a correlation between genetic factors, IQ, race and culture, to such an extent that he is considered by Magnus Linklater (1995) as belonging to those 'who make up the demonology of the right in matters of race and intelligence' (p. 141) (see also Benson 1995). Eysenck believed that as a concept, the notion of intelligence 'is useful in bringing some degree of coherence to a large assembly of variegated facts, events and behaviours' (Eysenck 1985, p. 116). Although an adherent of statistical research, Eysenck recognised three dimensions to intelligence (listed

below) and suggested that Intelligence B is what the general populace means when they speak of intelligence, a notion that resonates with Sternberg's 'implicit theories of intelligence' (1985, p. 31):

- Intelligence A (cognitive behaviour governed by biologically inherent traits)
- Intelligence B (all the daily practices of life influenced by the environment, culture, personality education and social factors)
- Intelligence C (measured by IQ but also recognising speed, persistence and error checking)

For Robert Sternberg (b.1949) (1986), comprehensive approaches to intelligence provide a more useful "real-life" guide to understanding intelligence compared to traditional numerical measures. Sternberg (1985), believes that intelligence is an intangible, malleable concept, but strives to understand it with his Triarchic Theory of Human Intelligence. This information-processing theory is, likewise with Eysenck's theory, composed of three parts, which describe and measure mental abilities incorporating contextual or practical intelligence, experiential or creative intelligence and componential or analytical intelligence. Additionally, consideration is given to both the internal and external worlds of individuals, conjectures how people capitalise on their strengths and weaknesses and how these relate to personal experiences. In part, Sternberg's theoretical work (1985) is informed by an examination of common or implicit understandings of intelligence coupled with explicit theories that emerge from the data gathered whilst people actually undertake tasks such as mental ability tests that purport to measure intelligent performance. Sternberg, acknowledging the existence of tacit knowledge, wrote in 1982(b) that

the informal theories of intelligence that laymen carry around in their heads-without even realizing that their ideas constitute theories-conform fairly closely to the most widely accepted formal theories of intelligence that scientists have constructed ... what psychologists study corresponds to only *part* of what people mean by intelligence in our society, which includes a lot more than IQ tests measure (p. 193; emphasis in original).¹⁰

¹⁰ As an aside, I find it intriguing that Sternberg, who as a student, suffered from test anxiety, has developed an intelligence test based upon his Triarchic Theory. Sternberg says of 'The Sternberg Triarchic Abilities Test' (STAT) that he is 'trying to put into practice what I have been preaching over the past several years', that is to 'devise measurement options that enable educators to assess the abilities posited by the theory in a reliable and valid way (Sternberg 1991, n. p.). An investigation into the STAT by Koke and Vernon (2003) found that test scores

In 1983, contemporaneously with Sternberg, Gardner, a developmental psychologist and cognitive theorist also proposed a theory of mind which became known as the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI). Initially, Gardner identified seven intelligences, which could be demonstrated in multifarious ways (verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal). Thus, MI can be understood as a contemporary model of a multifaceted view of intelligence. Gardner (1993 p. xiv), defined intelligence as 'the ability to solve problems, or to create products, that are valued within one or more cultural settings'. This definition, in accord with Sternberg, assumes that human endeavour is realised in a broad range of competencies, not necessarily evidenced by verbal-linguistic or logical measures and certainly not by a single test measurement as it also includes the application of practical knowledge. Phillipson (2000) considers MI to be a "high-level" view of intelligence, not only because it is viewed in cultural terms but because a product is required to ascertain its presence. This is in contrast to a "low-level" view of intelligence as produced by psychometric testing and an IQ score. Later, Gardner (1999) refined his definition of intelligence to mean '*a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture*' (p. 34; italics in original). Here, he retains the notion that intelligences cannot be measured, but includes the word 'potential' to indicate that other aspects of an individual's life impact upon the realisation or otherwise of possible aptitudes. Gardner suggests that these might include cultural values and opportunities and the influences of families, schooling and others upon personal decisions (Gardner 1999).

Gardner deliberated over his choices of words to encapsulate his theory. He writes 'I considered using the venerable scholarly term *human faculties*; psychologists' terms like *skills* or *capacities*; or lay terms like *gifts*, *talents* or *abilities* ... I finally elected ... a word from psychology ... and stretching it in new ways ...*intelligence*' (Gardner 1999, p. 33; emphasis in original). The

'are significantly related to a measure of general intelligence' (p. 1806) which is contrary to Sternberg's premise of devising an assessment instrument to support his Triarchic Theory.

word was paired with “multiple” creating what is now popularly known by its acronym “MI”. In the same period that Gardner was considering his MI theory, a flourishing parallel interest among many psychologists and social commentators delineated other types of intelligence, such as emotional intelligence (for example, Goleman 1996; Matthews, Zeidner & Roberts 2002; Salovey & Mayer 1990) and creative intelligence (Davis & Rimm 2004; Sternberg 1985). These are variously characterised as forms of “know-how” or special capacities, and indicate the extent to which a view of intelligence as a single quality has been challenged by a view of intelligence as multi-faceted.

Intelligence remains indefinable

Intelligence remains ‘the most elusive of concepts’ (Sternberg 1985, p. 3), due to the numerous conceptions of intelligence that appear interrelated but have indistinct connections with definitions spanning the range of the quantifiable to the qualitative. As Snow and Yalow noted in 1982, a core argument is whether intelligence is a single entity versus one composed of multiple qualities. And debates continue to the present; Gardner (1993, p. 6) calls proponents of the former ‘hedgehogs’ and the latter ‘foxes’, Piirto (1999, p. 12) borrows from a botanical taxonomy for plant classification (see, Mayr 1982), naming two sides ‘lumpers’ and ‘splitters’. Lumpers, such as Binet, Simon and Spearman believed that intelligence is a unitary trait but with different, specific abilities that are manifest in that intelligence, such as memorising material or programming a computer (Weinberg 1989). Splitters, such as Gardner, Guilford and Thurstone, argue that there are separate kinds of mental abilities or intelligences that operate virtually independently from each other (Piirto 1999; Weinberg 1989). Lumpers assert that general intelligence is represented by a single unitary measure such as the IQ.

Individuals who adopt a more qualitative approach to understanding intelligence tend to agree that, if intelligence exists, it cannot be measured, made explicit or encapsulated by a neat, unambiguous, specific definition. But, there are also those, such as educational psychologist, Philip E. Vernon (1905-1987) who adopted a middle ground and understood intelligence as an

hierarchical construct from the general to the specific with both genetic and environmental influences (Piiro 1999; Plucker 2003).

A multi-faceted model of intelligence, most notably in the form of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, continues to inform much current Victorian teaching practice and professional development (see, for example, DEECD 2007a; VCAA 2007). The "single versus multiple" intelligence debate is likely to continue, depending on the dominant political, social and educational values of intelligence and giftedness (see, for example the 2001 Senate Report 'Problems of defining 'gifted'' pp. 18-28).

Moving into the world of "real-life" experiences and practical knowledge beyond the traditional notions of IQ is a significant contribution to the realm of intelligence theorising and as Snow and Yalow (1982) posit, educational practices are premised upon the implicit or 'native faculties of intelligence' (p. 15) despite understandings of school-house giftedness. It is the relationship between intelligence, giftedness and school practice that I begin to explore in the next section.

Gifted education: signifiers and efficacy

In contrast to Plucker (2001) who suggests that the study of giftedness parallels that of intelligence, I see the development of the two fields as far more closely entwined in a symbiotic relationship that continues to the present. The concept of giftedness emerged from the quest to understand intelligence, but it subsequently expanded and shaped itself to accommodate research developments that occurred in cognitive neuroscience and psychology,¹¹ yet remaining an entity with its own discourses with which to express and perpetuate its existence embedded within the dividing practices of creating and categorising social types. So close is this relationship that selecting the most appropriate terminology to convey and share meaning has been problematic since Galton set in train the entire "nature versus nurture" intelligence debate

¹¹ This has resulted in publications for K-12 teachers (e.g., Sousa 2003), the dissemination of research findings at gifted conferences (e.g. Geake 2002; 1999) and in journals (e.g. Grigorenko 2007; Plomin, Kovas & Haworth 2007) as well as the naming conferences (e.g., *Our intelligent brain: teaching for successful intelligence* (1998) and *Using your brain: new perspectives for realising learning potential* (1997) both conducted by educational booksellers, Hawker Brownlow Education.

which continues to challenge researchers, theoreticians and teachers alike as previously evidenced by Gardner's (1999) dilemma.

When writing his thesis of hereditary genius, Galton (1972) selected words and terms such as eminent, intellectual, first class, prodigy, natural gifts and universally gifted; but it is his use of the word "endowed" when discussing Johnson's definition of genius as 'a man [my emphasis] endowed with superior faculties' (p. 26) that I see supporting my view that if not synonyms, intelligence and giftedness are understood as symbiotic. According to the Macquarie Dictionary (2001 p. 624), endowed means 'to furnish with some gift, faculty or quality', thus, the word "gift" is embedded in discussions, assumed as understood by the reader and emphasised by use of "natural gifts" or "universally gifted". Galton (1972) claimed that the word genius should not be used 'in any technical sense ...whatever its precise definition may be' (p. 26) but should denote exceptional, high and innate ability. My reading of this is that Galton was approaching the word genius in a utilitarian manner - uncertain of a definition, yet indispensable for theorising (see Galton 1972). However, he felt that the word "ability" was tempered by education, whereas the word "genius" denoted the innateness of the quality of genius (Galton 1972, p. 26). The debate continues, for example, Gagné (2003a, 2003b) posits that a gift is innate and might forever remain undeveloped whilst a talent is demonstrated ability. It is for this reason when writing the 1892 preface to the original edition Galton (1972), posited that his original book of 1869 should have been entitled "Hereditary Ability" not "Hereditary Genius".

Nineteenth century studies of evolution, heredity and genetics influenced educational studies, but it is not clear just when or where within the development of intelligence theory and gifted education the word "gifted" came to be equated with the highly capable in common parlance. James Borland (1997, p.7) states that '[I]n the 19th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Henry (1920) credited the coining of the term to Guy Whipple ... who later edited the 23rd National Society for the Study of Education Yearbook (1924), which like the 19th focused on gifted children and their education'. Margolin's (1994) research unearthed the term "gifted child"

being used in 1910. Of the two American theorists well-known for their longitudinal studies of gifted students, Leta Stetter Hollingworth (1886-1939) and Lewis M. Terman, it seems that Hollingworth was the first to utilise the word (see Hollingworth 1975; 1916). Terman persisted with terms such as genius, superior, exceptionally bright, wonder children and precocious (Terman 1919) when he and his colleagues began the study of individuals with superior functioning in the early 1920s.

Defining the gifted child

The slippery categories created within in the discourse of gifted education research are evidenced by the plethora of research literature, of itself an indication that so many continue to strive to encapsulate the elusive. Language in the field of gifted education employs terminology used at least since the time when Galton (1985; 1972) theorised about intelligence and spoke of genius, prodigies, superior intellect, natural ability, eminence, illustriousness, gifts, talent, idiocy and imbecility. It is evident that Galton strove to clarify the vagaries and interpretation of language in the explication of his work; for example, when discussing the distribution of ability related to the law of frequency he said, '[A] talent is a sum whose exact value few of us care to know, although we all appreciate the inner sense of the beautiful parable. I will, therefore, venture to adapt the phraseology of the allegory to my present purpose by substituting for "talent" the words "normal-talent"' (Galton 1985, pp. 4-5).

Rigorous academic debates have ensued over the interpretation and usage of terminology and language in the field of gifted education, particularly over the exact meaning of the terms "gifted" and "talented" (see, for example the debate between Gagné (1997a, 1997b) and Morelock (1997a, 1997b, 1996). For many, the terms gifted and talented are synonymous with intelligence and, according to Joan Wolf (1990); individuals assessed as well above average are considered and named as gifted. Generic representations of the terms gifted and talented continue to be problematic for both teachers and researchers simply because of a lack of consensus regarding meaning - as exemplified by the aforementioned debate (see also, Feldhusen 1998a; Winner 1996). Wolf

(1990) argues that because accepted definitions reflect current values and attitudes, and I suggest differing socio-cultural perspectives, definitions will never be universal. However, to the confusion of many, both experts and lay people (see, for example, Senate 1988) use the terms interchangeably. Many dictionaries list one as the meaning of the other, for instance, talented: 'possessing mental gifts' (Chambers 1972, p. 1376), 'having great ability, gifted' (Funk & Wagnalls 1985, p. 689) and gifted: 'endowed with talent' (Funk & Wagnalls 1983, p. 271). Nor are speakers of other languages immune from the challenges of trying to differentiate between a gift and a talent; similar problems in differing cultures occur in, for example, French (Collins Robert 1993 p. 138) and Latvian (Sosare & Borzvalka c1996, pp. 19, 168).

Despite continuing doubts of its exact provenance, Stanford University claims territorial rights over the word “gifted” linked as it is with Terman’s longitudinal study (Leslie 2000). Such linguistic appropriation exemplifies how a word can be taken from common usage and reapplied in similar, yet subtly different contexts. The word “gifted”, as used by Terman evolved into a value-laden cultural marker, identifying and labelling those performing at or above a certain level.¹² Although Piirto (1999) cautions readers to be mindful of the uncertainty and vagaries of terminology, each conception of giftedness serves to muddy rather than clarify the debate. It is hardly surprising then, that Borland (2005; 2003a, 2003b, 2003c), suggests that the world should dispense with the notion and concept of a gifted child and focus instead on education commensurate with individual needs. However, theorists continue in their endeavours to rectify the confusion over the terms or to highlight their preferred perspectives (see, for example, Clark 2008; Colangelo & Davis 2003; Heller et al. 2000; Mönks & Katzko 2005; Sternberg & Davidson 2005) from psychometric approaches, psychological constructs, developmental theories, thinking processes, creativity, achievement, performance and environment. Mönks and Katzko (2005) suggest that the principal themes ‘concern the *domain specification*, the notion of *quantitative level*, and the notion of *potential or latency*’ (p. 188; emphasis in original). Sternberg and Davidson

¹² See also BurrIDGE 2004, 2002; Crowley 1992; Honey 1997; Mackay 2003 for broader discussions on the evolution and peculiarities of language.

(2005) state that ‘teachers of the gifted need to know the similarities and differences among the conceptions. They cannot be expected to figure out these similarities and differences on their own’ (p. viii), which is exactly the position I believe that teachers in the case-study school found themselves when confronted by the Victorian *Bright Futures* gifted policy (DoE 1996, pp. 4-8).

The surveillance of gifted children

In 1916, Terman began his longitudinal study of the characteristics and behaviours of 1500 gifted students who had an average age of eleven (Clark 2008). Initially, the participants, forever tagged “Terman’s Termites”, were identified by their teachers, and were principally white (with two African-Americans, six Japanese-Americans and one American-Indian), middle class, urban children, most of whom resided in California (Davis & Rimm 2004; Leslie 2000). By 1928 there were 1,528 subjects aged between three and twenty-eight; 856 boys and 672 girls. All tested at an IQ greater than 135, with most above 140 (Davis & Rimm 2004). In 1925 Terman published *The Mental and Physical Traits of a Thousand Gifted Children*, explicitly using the word “gifted” for the first time in a title. In conjunction with his research colleagues, he also published the first of many volumes of *Genetic Studies of Genius* (1925, 1926, 1930, 1947, 1959) that encompass[ed] the life time of his original participants. The study will continue until 2020 (Council 2003) or ‘until the last one dies’ (Leslie 2000, n. p.).

Terman’s revisions of the Binet-Simon Intelligence Scale¹³ resulted in what continues to be known as the “Stanford-Binet Scale”. Piirto (1999) suggests that it is because of Terman’s overtly expressed racial views coupled with his ‘so-called scientific findings ... that IQ testing has been looked at with fear’ (p. 10). I rather think it is the definitive nature of a numerical score that many find disconcerting, for I believe that many educators, psychologists and even gifted theorists today are either unaware of, or choose to ignore, the intensity of the eugenic principles that grounded Terman’s research. For example, Linda

¹³ According to Colangelo and Davis (2003) the first revision appeared in 1916, the same year that the longitudinal study began, although Clark (2008) cites 1921. The Stanford-Binet intelligence Scale was subsequently revised in 1937, 1960 and 1986, one assumes to accommodate findings from the longitudinal study

Kreger Silverman (2002) claims that the Stanford-Binet was designed by Terman with the single minded intent to ‘identify extremely gifted children who might one day earn the label “genius” (n. p.) ignoring that he also spoke of bringing ‘high-grade defectives under surveillance and protection of society’ (Terman 1916 cited in Kamin 1995, p. 477).

However flawed when examined by today’s understandings, Terman’s work leaves a legacy in the continuing debates within the field of gifted education, not least of which is how to best identify highly able or “gifted” students (see, for example, Davis & Rimm 1994; Leslie 2000). His longitudinal study of gifted children, despite its faults (Leslie 2000) served to diminish many of the stereotypes such as frailty, timidity, and emotional immaturity that had long been associated with gifted children (Wolf 1990).

Regardless of Stanford University’s territorial claims, Leta Stetter Hollingworth, an educational psychologist, working in the same period as Terman, is lauded as the first to write a text on the gifted, publish using the word “gifted”, teach the first college course about the gifted and study giftedness in girls and women (see, for example, Davis & Rimm 2004; Klein 2000; Plucker 2003; Silverman 1991). A contemporary of Terman, in 1916 she also began a longitudinal study into exceptionally gifted students (IQ180+ S-B). According to researchers (e.g., Davis & Rimm 2004; Morelock 1996; Plucker 2003), Hollingworth not only believed in innate ability but that early identification plus an optimal education, including attention to the social and emotional domains, were essential in realising gifted potential. Thus, it is within her explorations to determine the best means of educating the gifted that she differed from Terman’s principal quest of defining and understanding inherited intelligence. However, Hollingworth’s advocacy of the genetic determination of intelligence/giftedness also shows a lack of immunity from the influence of eugenic principles that prevailed at the turn of the 20th century. Selden (2000) states that her writings clearly demonstrate a deep conviction that genetics determine intelligence and success, albeit tempered by socio-economic location and ethnicity. However, gender is not mentioned as a factor, in for example capable females, yet it was a major component of her research.

Recognition of gifted performance or talent and realising potential

Jackson and Klein (1997) are guided by Sternberg (1993) when they suggest that for a performance to be considered gifted in young children, it must encompass all of the following five qualities; it must be: (1) excellent, relative to the performance of peers who are the same age or who have had the same degree of instruction; (2) rare among the same peers; (3) demonstrable on some reliable and valid assessment instrument; (4) productive, or suggest potential for productivity and (5) it must have some societal value (Jackson & Klein 1997, p. 46). For adults, Susanne Richert (1997, p. 78) argues that 'while the combination of ability, creativity, and task commitment are indisputable requisites for manifestations of adult giftedness, the relative importance and the developmental patterns of each of these have not yet been demonstrated'. She also criticises the practice of mixing and matching a variety of data sources in the identification process (e.g. IQ scores with achievement tests, tests of creativity, student records, personality and self-concept measures, case study information, individual interviews, teacher or parent observations, and peer nomination), particularly for students. Richert (1997) suggests that assessor bias contaminates most of these measures, thus creating unreliable data which impacts upon non-mainstream students such as the poor or ethnically and culturally diverse.

Hybrid approaches are often used to suit the political agenda of various state education departments seeking (American) federal funds even though the intent may be to make the identification of gifted students more inclusive and defensible. Considering government expenditure in relation to the notion of nurturing "potential" (as noted by Jackson & Klein (1997) and a plethora of others such as Davis & Rimm 2004; Freeman 2001; Gross 2004; Mittan 1990; Senate 2001, 1988), Bibby (1999) posits that it is a consequentialist argument to argue for specific expenditure to nurture "gifted" potential, as gifted children have no more or less entitlement to special treatment than other children. Bibby considers that potential is not fixed and that '[E]ven where potentials are for good, it does not follow that they *should* be realised' (1999, n. p.; my emphasis), especially as there are no guarantees that potential can be

correctly (or even) assessed, measured or realised. Rather, “potential” should be optimised rather than maximised for all students in tandem with attention to deficits (see Babic 2003; Bibby 1999; Winstanley 2004; Young & Tyre 1992).

François Gagné (1985 p. 111), considers ‘giftedness [is] exceptional competence in one or more domains of ability, and ... talent [is] exceptional performance in one or more fields of human activity’. See also Gagné (2005 p. 99; 2003a p. 60) whereby he posits that giftedness is natural or untrained and talent has been systematically developed. Borland (1999) considers that Gagné’s (2004, 1997c, 1985) distinctions between the terms giftedness and talent are neither meaningful nor useful and the endeavour to achieve consensual definitions is an exercise in futility, particularly, as he has argued elsewhere (Borland 1997), the terms are socially constructed concepts.

Although Borland does not consider a lack of consensus an obstacle to educational provision for highly able students, his is one of the few dissenting voices (see also Margolin 1994, 1993; Sapon-Shevin 1996, 1994) in the rather noisy and continual etymological debate regarding the terms gifted and talented and the hierarchies within the constructs. How such hierarchies are determined and utilised is examined in the next section.

Degrees of giftedness

In 1972, the U.S. Office of Education made no distinction between gifted and talented children stating that they 'are those identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance' (U.S. Commissioner of Education, cited in Assouline 1997, p. 91). Differences between gifted and talented children are 'false distinctions' according to Richert (1997, p. 76), as they create an elitist hierarchy of giftedness. What particularly irks her is the designation of degrees of giftedness by utilising terminology usually associated with impairment: highly, severely, profoundly and even exotically gifted (see previous discussion and Table 2.1 in this chapter). Similarly, Sapon-Shevin (1994) argues that the label “gifted” is based on arbitrary decisions and that further refinement of the category of giftedness into distinctions such as “highly” or “exceptionally”

gifted requires scrutiny of the values underpinning the social construction of the term.

Richert (1997) suggests that some school authorities in America distort various definitions to distinguish between gifted and talented students. For example, the gifted are identified by general intelligence tests and the talented as the 'other gifted abilities ... that is, those having specific academic aptitude, creativity, leadership, and ability in the visual and performing arts' (Richert 1997, p. 76). Such distinctions become even more problematic when coupled with the virtually impossible task of determining potential as a delineator for specially designed programs for gifted children. For John Feldhusen (1998b) it is not only undesirable, but immoral to identify some students as “gifted” and by default, all other students as “ungifted”.

Gross, who endorses Gagné's definition of gifted and talented (Gross 1999a, 1996, n. d.; Gross & Slep 2000), has no compunction in using terminology similar to that which Richert abhors. An advocate of acceleration for gifted students, as previously noted, Gross uses the adverbs *mildly*, *moderately* (IQ range 130-144), *highly* (IQ 145+) and *profoundly* when linking these to the upper range of the bell curve distribution (see Gross 2004, 1998). She justifies such language to differentiate between degrees of giftedness, by arguing that the same words are used to express the extent of hearing impairment or to describe intellectual disability (Gross 1999a). Mara Sapon-Shevin (1994) argues that such disability labels 'have been analysed as social constructs in a way that the label “gifted” has not (p. 17) and feels that parallels can be drawn between being “gifted” or “at risk” because as broad and ill-defined labels they are ‘used [in the USA] to generate support and programming without careful examination of the accuracy of the label, the intention of the user, or the effects of basing school programming on such a paradigm’ (p. 17). However, supporters of gifted education such as Creed (1980) would argue that it is unacceptable if nothing is done for gifted children whilst academics prevaricate or engage in etymological debates.

That people are unsettled by the terminology is considered positive by Gross (1999b). She believes that it validates the hierarchical structure of ability levels which must be considered when providing for academically gifted children - just as teachers are required to consider the degree of learning disability when responding to special needs. Richert (1997, p. 76) asserts that the use of such hierarchies 'engenders elitism within programs, and excludes many students with gifted potential ... [and] that giftedness emerges ... through the interaction of innate abilities and learning or experience'. However, despite Richert's previously discussed criticisms, both Gross and Richert agree that identification of gifted students should be multi-faceted and not dependent on a single criterion such as IQ scores or teacher nomination (Gross 1999b; Richert 1997).

Davis and Rimm (1994) recognise that accepting any one particular definition of gifted and talented has implications for practice. They feel that it will determine:

- the personnel selected for implementing gifted programs,
- the identification and selection of students (with concerns regarding culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, under achievement and disability),
- programming practices (opportunities for different domain areas) and
- the labelling effect on students (self-esteem, personal expectations, peer alienation).

Renzulli (1986), warns all writers of definitions, regardless of their intent, to be aware of any potential ramifications and to 'recognize the practical and political uses to which their work might be applied. A definition of giftedness is a formal and explicit statement that might eventually become part of official policies and guidelines' (p. 54). Taking this further, Borland (1997, p.18) writes that

our primary task is either to construct the most educationally rewarding and equitable concept of giftedness we can or to find a way to move beyond the construct altogether to a vision of human development and learning that embraces the indescribable diversity of human consciousness and activity in a way that places limits on no child (or adult).

Sapon-Shevin (1994) also argues that the notion of giftedness, including degrees within categorisations should be eliminated, for giftedness ‘only exists within a system that, for a variety of reasons wishes to measure, select, and sort students’ (p. 18). This system is one which authors such as Bibby (1999) and Margolin (1994, 1993) suggest reflects the upper middle-class values and experiences from which the gifted construct emerged so, by seeking “the gifted”, the construct continues to thrive within a system, that is, the ‘school rules and policies, legal and educational practices designed to provide services for gifted students’ (Sapon-Shevin 1994, p. 17). So, by necessity, the gifted must be found whether by formal tests or lists of traits and characteristics to support the educational industry spawned to sustain the dividing practices recognising the gifted from the non-gifted; a practice which has grave social consequences, for generally, it is the wealthier and their children who gain further advantages (Bibby 1999; Feldhusen 1998b).

Acceptance of terminology: what’s in a name?

Just as the social construct of giftedness itself is not acceptable for many, the term “gifted” is also unacceptable; not only because it is bestowed rather than discovered (Borland 1997) but also because it implies the unearned effortlessness of something extra. Joan Freeman (1985) considers that for those who believe that all children are equal, the term is unjust. Such an inference also appears in languages and cultures other than our own, such as the Italian *superdotato* or, as translated from the Chinese, supernormal (Freeman 1985). Similarly, in the French, *surdoué* means a gifted or exceptional child (Collins Robert 1993, p. 417) with *sur* meaning above or over and *doué* gifted or talented; so, to be academically able is *doué sur le plan scolaire* (Collins Robert 1993, p. 138) implying that there are different manifestations of giftedness.

From my brief examination of the current understandings and differences of interpretation regarding terminology, I believe that the dilemma is within the metonymic usage of the terminology. Being gifted is seen as an attribute of intelligence, whereas being talented is an adjunct of giftedness, but not necessarily intelligence. Thus, the relationship between the terms gifted,

talented and intelligent remains unclear and no one is really certain which word actually describes which concept.

In summary, there remains no single, stable, unitary and universal definition of giftedness. The multiple intelligences theories of Gardner (1983) and Sternberg (1985) posit that individuals may have different strengths in different domains, leading to a view that “giftedness” may refer to different dimensions of intelligence rather than a global definition. Renzulli (1986) identifies three basic components of intelligence: above-average general ability and knowledge (domain related), a high level of task commitment and motivation plus a high level of creativity, whilst Gagné (1985) does not exclude from his definition those students who lack in motivation, suggesting that latent potential has not yet been demonstrated by performance. Such a multiplicity of understandings has implications for practice, depending upon which definition is adopted by education departments, by schools and by classroom practitioners for, as Sternberg and Davidson (2005) have suggested, the process and the choice is no simple matter.

This complexity is evident in the Australian context and particularly the state of Victoria. Whilst the Department of Education Victoria (DoE) (1996) acknowledges many competing models and definitions, it is a cautious approach intimating that the DoE has no clear theoretical position in which to embed its gifted policy (Galitis 2007). This vagueness might also be a deliberate ploy by the DoE to circumvent any accusations of conceptual misapplication or misinterpretation which might be aimed at either the DoE or its teachers. However, the *Bright Futures* (DoE 1996) documentation did illustrate that there are challenges in identifying gifted students as they are not a homogenous group and might well be underachieving at school, so masking their abilities. It is the aspect of identification of gifted students that I discuss in the next section.

Identifying gifted students in Australian schools

Despite its understanding that “the gifted” is a generic term for a disparate group, the DoE drew on numerous resources and theoreticians (1996, pp. 9-23)

to list the many diverse characteristics of gifted students to assist teachers identify gifted students. The DoE, viewing the education of gifted students as a long term investment for the benefit of society, deemed it important that teachers provide meaningful learning opportunities for students identified as gifted. However, because the DoE neither made its own understanding, nor the terminology utilised in the document explicit, practitioners were forced to sift through and choose among various models and guidelines which in a 'coordinated approach ... will emphasise the following areas' (DoE 1999, p. 5):

1. Identification and assessment of gifted students
2. Development and provision of appropriate programs for students
3. Curriculum development
4. Professional development¹⁴
5. Links with key education strategies
6. Networking and promotion (DoE 1999, p. 5).

Although the Department of Education Queensland (DoE 1998) acknowledged that teachers require some common ground as a starting point for identification and provision for gifted students, they too appeared to provide little or no advice beyond this recognition; this despite researchers such as Borland (1994) suggesting that clear goals and processes are required to identify gifted students and Sternberg and Davidson (2005) implying that teachers have neither the time nor the capacity to differentiate between differing conceptions of giftedness. The DoE (Victoria), in attempting to illustrate the ambiguity and debates concerning terminology, reinforce the complexity in finding common understandings and usage of the terminology and inherent assumptions within the field of gifted education. Accordingly, by avoiding explicit definitions of the words gifted and talented, the DoE has cultivated a convenient ambiguity enveloping the notion that the terms have a

¹⁴ Concurrently with the *Bright Futures*, the Standards Council of the Teaching Profession Victoria (SCTP) advocated a gifted and talented professional development program created by Comet Hill Primary School in conjunction with La Trobe University (Bendigo). It states that the 'program is one of the Department of Education's accredited programs in this learning area' (SCTP 1996, p. 37). The DoE appears to have adopted the format of the Comet Hill model for its *Bright Futures* professional development (DoE Victoria 1998).

multiplicity of meanings dependent upon the perspectives from which they are viewed. This stance is justified by the DoE (1996) as:

[G]iven the range of definitions and the difficulties that can arise when one definition is preferred, it was decided in Victoria that the Bright Futures policy would encompass a broad definition of “giftedness” embracing and encouraging excellence in all forms of intellectual, academic and creative endeavour (DoE 1996, p. 8).

Thus the DoE takes a covert rather than explicit “special education” approach to gifted education by taking ‘giftedness as exceptionality relative to the mean of ability in a specific setting’ Borland (1994, p.164), a relativity established within the normalising practices of an outcomes-based education. Similar tactics are employed for differentiation. Rather than an open declaration for a preferred model of differentiation, the DoE’s preference is advanced by suggestion: ‘Eddie Braggett (1994a) has proposed the following model [Accelerated learners & talented students: A total school approach] suggesting specific programming as designated levels. It represents the specific needs of the range of gifted students’. No other model is proffered (DoE 1996, p. 45). As an aside, from the first page of his 1985 book, Braggett utilises the word gifted with the assumption that its meaning is understood by all; similarly the word “talent” receives no definition prior to use.

Other education departments (for example, DECS 1996/2007; DoET WA 2004; EDWA c1995) by accepting Gagné’s (1985) definitions of gifted and talented or his model appear to have adopted a more Saussurian view of language as a relatively stable system with all users, albeit on a subconscious level, sharing a common meaning. Ferdinand de Saussure, (1857-1913) whose ideas formed the basis for structuralism, regarded language as a sign system comprised of a *signifier* or word and the *signified* or concept (see, for example, Appignanesi et al., 1999, Crowley 1992; Sim 1998). Therefore, those Australian education departments accepting of Gagné’s (1985) notion of gifted and talented are assuming that all practitioners will act in a particular and shared way by identifying students in these categories. In Victoria, the DoE ostensibly entrusted teachers to construct their own professional knowledge about gifted students after being informed by the *Bright Futures* policy and professional development program, yet risked that the constructs would be

compatible with the official statement, despite intimating that the entire field operates non-consensually. Acknowledging the amorphous nature of the constructs of intelligence, giftedness and talent, the DoE still expected its teachers to identify, plan and provide sound educational programs for gifted and talented students.

In this thesis, I explore in part whether the professional paralysis regarding gifted issues experienced by some of my colleagues is partly due to individual conceptions of 'what they feel they need to know or want to know' (Wagner 1993, p. 21) and, if they *know* it, just how this influences their practice. Particularly, this means the acceptance by teachers of the concept of giftedness which then leads to the educational provision of gifted children. This constitutive issue is central to the reality or otherwise of what becomes a social reality in education, and for the Australian situation, the notion of recognising gifted children so that they can then be identified, has had a precarious existence.

The recognition of gifted students in Australia

Australia has had a long and erratic history of gifted education (see, for example, (Braggett 1985; Vialle 1997). Ralph Pirozzo suggested in 1984 that various members of Australian society hold specific beliefs and assumptions impeding the provision of programs for gifted students. These are: that very few gifted students actually exist, but for those who do, success is inevitable regardless of what occurs during schooling; that motivation, persistence and commitment are inherent within gifted students; that giftedness is a unitary trait and that elitism results by providing differentiated programs for gifted students.

It was hardly a novel insight when in 1988, the Senate Select Committee noted the paucity of provision for gifted students and that Australia showed 'significant resistance to encouraging individual excellence' (Senate 1988, pp. 2-3). The same report recommended that 'in the interests of social justice ... schools have a major responsibility to advance the talents of their highly able

students' (p. 173). The ambivalence towards provision for gifted students is most apparent when egalitarian and equity issues are predominant social issues (Gallagher 1985). Thus, highly visible educational practices such as ability groupings are withheld in favour of heterogeneous classes supported by the very same social justice argument proffered by the Senate Select Committee (1988) for the need to advance the education of gifted students. The 2001 review of the 1988 report by Senate Select Committee stated that 'there has been little progress in provision for gifted children since 1988 ... many teachers feel a lack of expertise, lack confidence and lack of resources to meet the needs of gifted children' (Senate 2001, p. xi). So, for all the recent professional development and supposed heightened awareness of appropriate education in terms of individual learning needs for gifted students, little had changed in the intervening decade.

Wilma Vialle (1997) believes that it is only relatively recently that educators have realised the value of basing their philosophies and practice upon quality research 'rather than the whims of passing governmental bodies' (Vialle 1997, p. 51). Yet a discrepancy still exists between what research reveals about gifted students and teacher understandings of the options available for gifted students, in particular acceleration. Gross (1994) writes of 'the lack of awareness among teachers and administrators of the academic and social benefits, for gifted students, of what we in New South Wales term "accelerated progression", and their resultant wariness of this form of intervention' (p. 3). According to Gross (1998, p. 169), 'teachers often assume that a child who enters school already reading must have been taught to read by her parents, and many teachers resent this'. Just what exactly teachers resent has not been made clear by Gross and further investigation into the phenomena of teacher resentment could well provide some useful understandings of professional role expectations and the perceived encroachment by others into professional territory.

Resentment as ill-will is not far removed from the emotion of envy. Mark Stein posits that 'envy has the potential for substantial destructiveness in social systems' (Stein 2000, p. 193). He feels that within every group and organisation but 'especially where work and the products of work are

concerned ... envy may be understood as a property of the group ... and not just the individuals within them' (p. 194). This is a challenging notion, as perhaps the continuing 'negative community attitudes to giftedness' (Senate 2001, p. xi) are reinforced by collective teacher envy; envy that certain individuals are endowed with something special. Renzulli (1998) likens this "something special" as an endowment of a golden chromosome. He uses this analogy to support the argument against differentiating between degrees of giftedness and misguided searches for silver and bronze chromosomes.

This may be an unconscious feeling, so deeply entrenched within the self or within the collective of egalitarianism that its very presence can be denied. But, it might mean that even educated professionals are unable to rise above such an emotion in response to the needs of gifted students and could well be the 'fundamental lacuna ... in ... groups, organizations and society' (Stein 2000, p. 194) - particularly in Australia - that explains why giftedness and gifted education has not been widely accepted. I expound upon this theme in relation to the development of Australian education in Chapter Four of this thesis.

A study in NSW by Smith and Chan (1996), found that secondary school teachers had only a 'moderate understanding of the general characteristics of gifted students' (p. 26) and even less knowledge of the inherent problems experienced by such students. They also found that female teachers 'had a greater understanding of the general characteristics of gifted students than did their male counterparts' (p. 28). This is a thought provoking statement that requires further clarification. Just what traits¹⁵ female teachers possess that enables a greater understanding of gifted students than their male colleagues is not mentioned by Smith and Chan. However, feminist psychologists suggest that differences are evident between women and men in emotional, moral and empathic domains which might have a bearing on Smith and Chan's (1996) observations (see, for example, Burman 1990; Gilligan 1982/1993; Pinker 2008). Related to this aspect of trait differentials, Gardner (1999, p. 110) is

¹⁵ Davis and Rimm (1994) offer a list of preferred characteristics of teachers of the gifted. These characteristics are not differentiated in terms of perceived feminine or masculine traits.

intrigued by the question 'of whether men and women use their intelligences in identical ways' and notes that work on moral judgements suggests women have greater interpersonal strengths whilst men use logical-mathematical thinking. Gilligan's (1982/1993) work led her to conclude that

the moral imperative ... [for] women is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate "real and recognisable trouble" of this world. For men, the moral imperative appears rather as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference the rights to life and self-fulfilment' (p. 100).

Similarly to other authors (see, for example, Béchervaise 1996; Chamberlin & Moore 2006; Collins 2000; Croft 2003; Hansen & Feldhusen 1994; Lee 1999; Megay-Nespoli 2001; Moon, Callahan & Tomlinson 1999; Rowley 2002; Vialle, Lockyer & Knapp 2003; Zundans 2006) Smith and Chan (1996) found that teachers who had some gifted education background knowledge, plus a familiarity with gifted children, were generally more favourably disposed towards the provision of special services for gifted students than their colleagues who had no such experience. Thus teachers' attitude towards the gifted principle is vital (Plunkett 200a, 200b). Indeed, I observed that my colleagues, who attended the Boroondara Gifted Network meetings in a professional capacity, have children who are considered gifted (Field notes). Smith and Chan (1996) do not specify if only female teachers had undertaken professional development in gifted education.

School procedures for identifying the gifted and talented

Davis and Rimm (1994, pp. 50-51), offer three basic, common sense considerations when identifying gifted and talented students. Firstly, that identification methods and definitions of gifted and talented students correlate, secondly that the identification methods must complement the proposed program(s) and, thirdly, that the identification methods be defensible within the school community. But if one accepts the notion of giftedness and that it is embedded in the Western way of knowing, then it follows that many of the conventional procedures for identifying gifted and talented students are biased towards the dominant culture. In the Australian context, this continues to be white and middle-class (Senate 1988). Special populations that are overlooked include Aboriginal students, students from lower socio-economic classes or culturally different backgrounds, the gifted handicapped (also known as "twice

exceptional” students), gifted underachievers and gifted girls (see, for example, Kerr 1985; Lee 2000; Merrotsy 2003; Senate 1988; Silverman 2003; Wolf 1990).

In its *Bright Futures* Resource Book, the DoE (1996) itemised and outlined various approaches available to help identify gifted and talented students (see pages 14-31; 51-77). This resource also lists the characteristics of gifted students (see also Betts & Neihart 1988; Byles 1995; Colangelo & Davis 2003, 1997; Davis & Rimm 2004; Gallagher & Gallagher 1994; Mittan 1990; Parker 1993; Passow 1981; Tasmania Department of Education n. d.; VanTassel-Baska 1998), and provides formal and informal procedures for identification. The complexity of understanding required for each approach is not apparent in the condensed versions that are offered in the *Resource Book*. Perhaps such a tactic was taken to expedite or simplify procedures for schools, but because the DoE has not been clear in its own definitions of gifted and talented students, it is difficult to see how their document meets the three considerations recommended by Davis and Rimm. I suspect that in relation to these, the generic instruments lack the specificity and direction required and this may indeed be intentional so that each school community can construct its own procedures for identification and programming. However, as a teacher, I found that it was a challenge to do so on the basis of the *Bright Futures* document alone and that I was in danger of focusing more on the processes of identification to the detriment of actually providing differentiated programming.

Parker (1993, p. 20) believes that it is important for all school staff 'to be trained in awareness of the characteristics of gifted children' so that they can provide 'a challenging school environment where difference is accepted, talents are nourished' by a 'wide range of stimulating programs', rather than spending an inordinate amount of time on 'gate keeping entry into programs',¹⁶ yet,

¹⁶ The 'gate keeping' was time consuming. Often it seemed as if the principal focus of my C&O role was to resolve the tensions that arose as a result of mismatched perceptions between teachers and parents. This task, coupled with broad perspectives in the *Resource Book* often took precedence over all else, in an effort to 'collect data from multiple sources; [and] avoid a single criterion of giftedness' (Parker 1993, p. 19).

whilst Freeman (2005) acknowledges that ‘many teachers can be very perceptive, spotting and nurturing talent that others or tests may miss’ (p. 86) generally, neither intuition nor inspirational teachers are lauded as adequate by those who advocate quantitative approaches to recognise giftedness.

Conclusion

In this section I presented an overview of some of the literature regarding the history of intelligence and the emergence of the construct of giftedness, the gifted child and gifted education. I reiterated that the social construct of giftedness emerged in a symbiotic relationship with intelligence and the associated eugenics movement. This social control movement embedded within a specific cultural context advocated racial improvement based upon hereditary intelligence. I explained how the evolution of intelligence measurement served to ratify the notion of giftedness, before finally drawing my attention to the Australian context and the State of Victoria. In Chapter Three, my methodology chapter, I explain my chosen research methodology and how a Foucauldian/feminist perspective is useful for understanding the evolution of normalisation in education and educational psychology.

Chapter Three

Methodological and conceptual frameworks

The following chapter maps the methodological and conceptual frameworks for this study. It justifies the rationale for the selected research strategies and explains the interconnections between the research questions, the structure of the research and the qualitative research methodologies that I employ. This discussion explains why a single-case case study approach was adopted, one that combined interview transcripts, field notes and school documents and associated policies and programs from relevant departments of education. This approach was underpinned by a theoretical framework that draws selectively upon both Foucauldian concepts and feminist perspectives. The contribution of these concepts and perspectives to examining and understanding the single-case case study is discussed, including my subjective positioning as a researcher with teaching experience in the case study school. I begin by mapping some of the key features of case study methodology, noting some of the main lines of methodological debate regarding this approach.

Rationale for selection of case study approach

In seeking to understand the effects of the implementation of the *Bright Futures* policy within the school community, I have adopted a qualitative stance. Qualitative research is research based upon non-numerical information collected to answer a research question (Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagaard 1994; Merriam 1998; Tesch 1990). It seeks to capture something of the characteristics of a situation and focuses on the contextualised meaning of social phenomena by trying to understand a given situation, rather than providing proof for a hypothesis based upon quantitative evidence. Sharan Merriam (1998) emphasises that qualitative research is oriented to understanding the socially constructed reality people derive from their interactions with the world. Thus, investigations are conducted within these social worlds, with researchers working directly with individuals, endeavouring to understand the subjective meanings people have constructed from their experiences. Cohen and Manion (1994) state that data gained in this

manner is glossed 'with the meanings and purposes of those people who are their source' (p. 37). In turn, Merriam (1998) notes that these meanings and experiences are filtered through the researcher's own perceptions and subjectivities. Knowing and understanding a particular phenomenon is predicated upon gaining an insight into people's behaviours that, as Cohen and Manion (1994) note, are as varied as the situations and contexts within which they unfold.

Some authors (Bell 1987; Tesch 1990; Schwandt 1997) suggest that the blanket term of qualitative inquiry embraces ethnography, case study research, naturalistic inquiry, phenomenology, life history methodology, narrative inquiry and more besides. Such a wide choice of orientations requires comprehension of the complexities inherent within each approach to order select the most appropriate one for a proposed study. Put simply, two key research questions for this thesis are, "How did the *Bright Futures* policy and its implementation inform a school community?" and "Why did teachers nominate particular students for extension and enrichment programs?" According to Robert Yin (1994), a case study approach is the preferred strategy for addressing how and why questions, such as those that motivated my project. To guide beginning researchers, he offers a summary table to assist with determining an appropriate strategy for pursuing different types of research issues. Although addressing general research in the social sciences, and not specifically educational research, Yin's model (1994) (see Table 3.1 below), supports the choice of a case study strategy for my research questions. It is the only qualitative approach within this framework that locates the research in current contexts, and does not involve control over behavioural events, which, for my case study was neither required nor deemed appropriate. Even though in this model surveys share similarities with case study, a case study approach affords greater intimacy than seeking information solely using questionnaires (Somekh & Lewin 2005).

Strategy	Form of research question	Requires control over behavioural events?	Focuses on contemporary events?
Experiment	How? Why?	Yes	Yes
Survey	Who? What? Where? How many? How much?	No	Yes
Archival analysis	Who? What? Where? How many? How Much?	No	Yes/No
History	How? Why?	No	No
Case study	How? Why?	No	Yes

Table 3.1: relevant situations for different research strategies (Yin 1994, p. 6)

Definition of case study

Case study is a rather malleable term for research approaches concerned with examining a particular phenomenon, or a single aspect of a phenomenon, that is specific and bounded both in time and place (Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis 1976; Hamilton 1980; Merriam 1998; Schwandt 1997; Stark & Torrance 2005). Robert Stake (1995, p. 133) suggests that the case is a unit of study, ‘a student, a classroom ... a program ... but not a problem, a relationship or a theme...it is a something that we do not sufficiently understand and want to - therefore, we do a case study’; thus for Stake (2000, p. 435) ‘it is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied’. By way of contrast, Yin (1994, p. 13) sees case study as a research process, ‘an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’. My position follows Stake (2000) as I am seeking to understand the response within the Atlas Primary School community to the *Bright Futures* gifted policy initiatives. But I also take elements of Yin’s approach as I am investigating ‘a contemporary phenomenon’ (1994, p. 13) in the context of the wider educational enactments situated in a particular political climate.

Similarly, Thomas Schwandt (1997, p. 36) not only views case study as a research process, but also posits that it is empirical research, because ‘it deals with the data of experience ... based on the evidence of observations, both

those of the inquirer and the reports of people being studied'. He clarifies any confusion that might arise between the terms empirical research and empiricist by explaining that 'a strict empiricist account of knowledge ... holds that claims about social reality or human action are verifiable with reference to brute data' (p. 37). That is, with such a perspective, no research should be polluted by the inclusion of subjective interpretations as might be found in research that deals with insight and understanding, as in a qualitative case study. Thus, in accord with Schwandt's observation, I am taking an empirical rather than an empiricist approach. And following Stake, my choice of a case study approach arises from the type of issues and problems that I want to understand.

Initially, Merriam (1988) felt that a case study could be defined in terms of its end product, that is, the result of an 'intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit' (p. 16). Later she (Merriam 1998), proposed that the notion of a case as a bounded system is the preferred defining characteristic for case study as research, even though it is concerned with what Shaw (1978), calls the contextual interpretation of practice. Stake (1994) rather neatly sums up the continuing debate about the term case study by saying that it is 'both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning' (p. 237), capturing a 'time-framed picture' (Bachor 1987, p. 3).

Position of case study within the field of qualitative research

Although Renata Tesch (1990) asserts that traditional case study approaches are entrenched within qualitative research, Merriam (1998) observes that there still exists a paucity of resource material relating directly to case study and just how it is differentiated from other qualitative approaches. In her view this might partly be due to the term case study having a multiplicity of meanings and usages, and that most case studies in education utilise theories and approaches from other disciplines such as anthropology, history, sociology, psychology and educational psychology. Bridget Somekh (Somekh & Lewin 2005) also throws philosophy into this *mélange*. Case study might seem 'to fit *everywhere*' (Wolcott 2001 p. 91; emphasis in original), but such non-

categorisation is not unique to the use of case study as a methodology in education. It applies to many aspects of educational research which adopt interdisciplinary approaches rather than a focus on a single discipline. The niche educational research occupies, according to Somekh (2005), has been influential in the evolution of social science theory. Merriam (1998), more specifically sees the discrete disciplines within the social sciences, such as anthropology, sociology and social psychology, informing both the theory and methods of case studies in education. These differing perspectives illustrate what has become a rather symbiotic arrangement whereby theorising from various disciplines from the past to the present has informed educational research and, in turn, educational research has influenced the social sciences.

More specifically, the common characteristics shared by case study and other qualitative approaches in education such as ethnography, phenomenology and grounded theory are:

- the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning
- the researcher as primary instrument of data collection and analysis
- the use of fieldwork
- an inductive orientation to analysis
- findings that are richly descriptive (Merriam 1998, p. 10)

These commonalities lead back to the original premise that a case study differs from other qualitative approaches by the virtue of its focus on intensive descriptions and analysis of a specific phenomenon or an event bounded in time as 'a form of reporting' (Wolcott 2001, p. 91) rather than a particular research strategy. Thus it is the form of the case study which distinguishes it from the disciplinary orientations of ethnography and phenomenology and the function of grounded theory (see, for example, Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis 1976; Merriam 1998).

According to Thomas (1998), the discovery of the numerous and complex factors that constitute each unique bounded system is the greatest benefit resulting from undertaking a case study. It is because of the particular context

and nature of the research problem and the questions being asked to understand its complexity, that one opts for a case study approach (Merriam 1988, 1998; Stake 1988; Stark & Torrance 2005). The development of particular understandings rather than the formulation of generalisations, is, according to Stake (1995), the ‘real business’ (p. 8) of doing a case study, as choosing to do a case study in preference to any other comparative method, ‘aim[s] the inquiry toward understanding of what is important about that case within its own world’ (Stake 2000, p. 439).

The claim that case studies do allow for ‘generalisations either about an instance or from an instance to a class’ was posited by Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis in 1976 (p. 8), but they observed that these very features carried inherent limitations and provided cause for criticism from those opposed to case study approaches. Stake (2000) does acknowledge that intrinsic case study researchers, and their readers, recognising their own experiences, tend to make generalisations for future events or different situations related to the case. He warns that care must be taken not to be overly committed to making generalisations and thus lose sight of developing a deeper understanding of the case itself.

Yin (1994) cautiously acknowledges the rationale for undertaking a single-case case study, but only under certain conditions, such as ‘where the case represents a critical test of existing theory, where the case is a rare or unique event, or where the case serves a revelatory purpose’ (p. 44). According to Yin’s justifications, my study would be acceptable as it falls under his third point for choosing to do a single-case case study; an in-depth inquiry which enabled participants to present their point of view on policies and practices related to gifted education; the process becoming revelatory for both the participants and the researcher. Firstly, it enabled the participants to think, speak and offer an opinion within a “legitimate space” (perhaps for the first time) about the actual implementation process of the *Bright Futures* policy and their subsequent classroom practices. Secondly, as initiator of the case-study, I became the conduit for their comments, and so my curiosity to learn about the *Bright Futures* professional development [BFPD], and my role as both BFPD

facilitator and former Challenges and Opportunities teacher, has also led to revelations in a process whereby I too, have been permitted to speak with many former colleagues in a differing manner to our previous interactions. The completed document, which will be available for Atlas Primary School teachers (as determined by the University Ethics agreement), might also provide insights for both the participants as well as those who declined to be part of the study.

One of the real strengths of this single-case case study, however, is my very intimacy with the situation, my “knowing” of the case, and its many participants. Although this is, in and of itself, another layer of complexity and social activity within the case study, it is also a positive, for it acknowledges the reality of our past and our shared professional work spaces. I do not deny the challenges (such as researcher bias) inherent in doing such a case study, but view my past association with the school as not only a past social reality, but as a marker for our shared experiences which provide a particular standpoint as I seek to identify, describe, analyse and theorise about what transpired in a specific educational context, in a particular setting and time. This particular positioning is elaborated below in the discussion related to intimacy.

Application and purpose of a case study method to the research question

In seeking to understand attitudes toward gifted education after the *Bright Futures* professional development within a specific school site, I view the case study as contained within two bounded systems. The first is the school community within the confines of the institution known as “school” and the second is the implementation of the Department of Education’s *Bright Futures* policy. Adelman et al. (1976, p. 3) refer to such straightforward examples as boundary setting, for ‘the boundaries have a common sense obviousness’. Thus, to use Yin’s (1994) notion of case study inquiry, the school community is the real-life context for the phenomena of the behaviours of the teachers.

However, just how and where boundaries exist or overlap between the phenomena of teacher behaviours and the *Bright Futures* policy expectations within the social structures and context of the school community are not

immediately apparent. This reflects the micro (school) and macro (governmental policy) levels that Kenway et al. (1998) believe affect social and cultural processes in, for example, gender reform or, in my case, the passage and impact of gifted education programs. The setting in my research encompasses not only the geographical locale of the school, but its class, culture and past history. It is also embedded in the realm of the professional expectations of individuals such as administrators, teaching and ancillary staff, as well as those of parents and the students themselves; all functioning within the machinations and gaze of a state government and its school policies. Stark and Torrance (2005) note that the physical location (such as the school site) is often considered as the “boundary” of the case study, whereas social and historical contexts also assist in contextualising present action.

Stake (1995) speaks of case studies being intrinsic, instrumental or collective. As the purpose of this research is to gain an insight into teachers’ post-professional development notions of giftedness and what it means for their practice, this research would, according to Stake’s classification (1995), belong in the realm of instrumental case study. By gaining an understanding of teachers’ perceptions of giftedness beyond the *Bright Futures* Professional Development (BFPD) program, it is anticipated that this might provide broader understandings of the BFPD or gifted policies through insights afforded from this particular case as an exemplar of a policy driven professional development intervention. Thus, the case study becomes an illumination, in the sense that the research process provides further understandings of not only gifted education and gifted students, but also insights into the forms of professional development associated with the area.

Data

To create a case requires data. Stake (1995) observes that the ‘data gathering plan will be elaborate’ (p. 51). His list of absolute essentials for such a plan are: ‘definition of case, list of research questions, identification of helpers, data sources, allocation of time, expenses, intended reporting’ (p. 51). This list is by no means complete, as many unofficial activities encroach upon the time allocation such as networking with participants or pursuing emerging issues,

but construction of such a plan is necessary ‘if one faces a difficult review panel, such as a doctoral committee or funding competition’ (p. 51). According to Stake (1995) there is no particular time when data gathering begins and my initial data gathering began when plunging into my own (incomplete) professional archives long before the formal commencement of this research study. Indeed, to even contemplate commencement of a formal study requires some prerequisite familiarity, forethought or interest in the area of focus such as my interest being generated from the specificity of my *Bright Futures* facilitator experience in my previous work place. Stake (1995) refers to these as ‘first impressions’ (p. 49) which initially are informal observations, eventually becoming modified or replaced when the study commences.

Although I have pursued a study of a single case, that is, the school, I believe that the sub-cases comprising individual teachers and administrators, could also locate the study as a collective, as each is instrumental to my learning about the effects of the BFPD and its associated policy. However, such a belief according to Stake (1994) is erroneous, as for it to be correctly termed a collective case study I would need to study more than one case or school. Nevertheless, my point is that what conventionally might be defined as a single case study is one of several interconnected domains, each possessing an intrinsic dynamic and meaning which warrants close-up analysis. These domains, as a collective, partially comprise the single entity of the school or to put it another way, a case will be built to create a picture of the whole comprised of many parts.

An interview approach – which I employed – in contrast to a purely observational approach, falls into the category of a ‘condensed case study’ (Stenhouse 1981, p. 5). By undertaking an in-depth case study in one location, Lawrence Stenhouse’s definition of a condensed case study is not strictly met, as this definition applies to multi-sited case studies. However, the restricted and compressed time frame for both the interviews and any informal observations undertaken led to an intense accumulation of a great volume of records that could not be immediately or concurrently analysed. Consequently, much of the analysis of the case study materials – transcripts, field work notes,

official and informal documentation – happened some time after completion of the fieldwork, though fieldwork notes were completed in the course of the interviews and informal observations. Stenhouse (1981) has compared such deferred examination of case study data with writing contemporary history in the sense that the material produced immediately becomes a kind of historical artefact of a “time” that has passed. In many respects, much writing about qualitative research is locked in this paradox, trying to capture the present, yet the writing and analysis typically occurs some time after the original fieldwork (McLeod & Thomson 2009).

Criticism of case study approaches

Why a single case

Much methodological discussion about case study argues that unless the intended phenomenon of the study is bounded, it is not a case (see, for example, Merriam 1998; Stark & Torrance 2005). Linked to data collection, delineated boundaries must be established, even though this exercise might not be an easy task (Stark & Torrance 2005). For example, boundaries are observations that are restricted to a specific time or, as in this research, a finite number of interviewees. The possibility of limitless opportunity prevents the categorisation of the phenomenon as a case study. In my study, as in others, there were also practical issues related to the manageability of data, participant availability and external deadlines which arise if a boundary is not established.

My choice of methodological approach was also strongly influenced by my prior teaching experiences and involvement in the school and in gifted education. I cannot and I do ‘not have to pretend that [I came] in with a “blank slate” but ... acknowledge the embedded prejudgements and [allow] them to be *critically* scrutinized’ (Gitlin, Siegel & Boru 1989, p. 249; emphasis in original). My interest in gifted education, gender issues and my curiosity about the impact of both upon professional practice evolved over many years during my own teaching experience. This, in turn, was shaped by many factors, including the influences of colleagues, school management teams and wider educational policy climates. Thus, the choice of a case study approach also arose in the context of my employment history and my continuing professional

development. My specific interest in the case could also be termed intrinsic, as I wished to learn more about a particular or bounded case – in this instance, the school community in which I once worked (Stake 1994). The use of case study approaches polarises many authors, nevertheless, there are many valid concerns and criticisms that require consideration. The common thread in all of these relates to human subjectivities and foibles.

Firstly, authors raise concerns related to the impact and role of the researcher. Researchers might become too close to the phenomena of the study so providing cause for political or personal dissonance (MacDonald & Walker 1974; Adelman et al. 1976; Walker 1983). Personal shortcomings such as limited interpersonal skills or sensitivities or a lack of specialised interviewing techniques might intrude or intervene into lives of others (Hakim 1987; Merriam 1998; Walker 1983). Walker (1983) considers that even within the most democratic of research designs, the researcher holds power. This power might, for example, be used to selectively choose data to support preconceived conclusions (Merriam 1998; Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002), which could pose substantial ethical risks (Hakim 1987; Stake 1995).

Secondly, there are concerns with the data, such as problems with confidentiality, access to, and control over, the data (MacDonald & Walker 1974). As noted, the phenomenon might alter or evolve over the study period (Stake 1995) or a variance might occur between the actual beliefs or behaviours of the participants and the recorded and/or reported beliefs or behaviours (Kellehear 1993; Stark & Torrance 2005; Walker 1983), so raising issues of reliability and validity (Merriam 1998; Stake 1995). The readers of the case study might be unable to distinguish between the data and interpretations of the data (MacDonald & Walker 1974; Walker 1983) and case study triangulation protocols are not uniform (Stake 1995). There is no generalisability of principles drawn from one case study to other cases as the evidence is limited to a particular case (Merriam 1998; Stake 1988; Stark & Torrance 2005; Thomas 1998; Walker 1980; Yin 1994; McLeod & Yates 1997). Because of this, case studies can be criticized as having limited political impact compared to statistical studies (Stake 1988).

Thirdly, critical issues relate to the production of the final document. Good case studies are difficult to do not only because of the paucity of guidelines for reporting case studies but because they can be lengthy and labour intensive. The possibility exists of producing an unwieldy document that over simplifies, distorts or exaggerates a situation which also relates to reader bias and/or preconceptions, Conversely, a lack of time or financial considerations might impact on the case study researcher who wishes to produce a 'rich, thick description and analysis of a phenomenon' (Merriam 1998, p. 42) and the document might languish unread as time poor practitioners will neither read or nor implement the findings (For elaboration of these points, see Adelman et al. 1976; MacDonald & Walker 1974; Merriam 1998; Shaw 1978; Stake 1995, 1988; Walker 1983; Yin 1994).

The strengths and value of a case study approach

Despite such criticisms of doing case study research – which also in many respects apply to undertaking qualitative research more broadly – there remains a strong warrant for a case study approach to investigate the questions that underpin this study. Case study allows for close up explorations of subjective experiences and of specific phenomena in action. This is commonly regarded as one of the key features that distinguish qualitative from quantitative methodologies. Some proponents of quantitative approaches argue, however, that conventional attitude measurement techniques can provide understandings of how the social world functions (Forgasz, Smith & Henry 2001, p. 6). Many of these measurement techniques have their nascence in psychology – such as Thurstone's Equal-Appearing Interval scales; Likert-scales; Semantic differential scales; Guttman scaling; and various types of checklists or inventories. While attitude scales may generate some useful data, they tend to abstract the findings from the context in which they were generated. My focus is explicitly on understanding subjective experiences and perspectives within a particular setting, and it is the specificity of both dimensions that a close up qualitative case study allows. Further, I decided on a case study approach as I deemed this the most appropriate way to record and examine the multiple and complex realities within the research site, which

encompassed my previous teaching experience, my own values and interaction with both the participants and the site.

My decision to research and write meaningfully of a former work place is a form of situated research, in which the issues and challenges encountered have a strong personal and professional resonance for me. According to Foucault (1980, p. 64), ‘if one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then it is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question’. Related arguments have also been proposed by feminist researchers, with debates about the role of the researcher and the significance of their autobiographical investments integral to much methodological discussion (Harding 1987; Lather 1991; Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002). The ‘area in question’ that I wish to understand is a physical and occupational work site. My interest was sparked not only by my curiosity to know “What happened next?” from the particular perspective of the participants after I had left the school, but also by what I observed during and after the *Bright Futures* professional development program. My understandings of school praxis, its ‘struggles’ and the ‘lines of force, tensions and points of collision’ (Foucault 1980, p. 65) within, results from my experiences as a teacher in the school community and includes my role as a *Bright Futures* professional development facilitator. Such awareness became one of the prompts for my case study. Yet school communities are complex environments and do not remain static. This case study thus straddles a common methodological tension of attempting to capture and record a specific moment and process in time, while acknowledging that in the passage of research time – from data collection, reflection and writing – these events are subject to change, even as we attempt to understand them and paradoxically “preserve” them as a case study (McLeod & Thomson 2009). However, I argue that hindsight affords a particular clarity that is not afforded in “real time”.

My role as researcher: intimacy and reflexivity

Compared to experimental methods, an important part of case study research is the intimate social process which results in a ‘social product’ (MacDonald &

Walker 1974, p. 184) as a consequence of interpersonal engagement. Although MacDonald and Walker (1974) are concerned by such intimacy, many others see it as an integral part of qualitative research and an aspect that needs to be acknowledged rather than denied or even removed (for example, Denzin & Lincoln 2000, 1994; Lather 1992, 1991, 1986). I was mindful that, as someone already acquainted with the then culture and practices of Atlas Primary School, the notion of intimacy, whether or not established, required exemplary professional research conduct. My ethical assurances to APS personnel were guided not only by University Ethical requirements, but also by my own deeply held personal principles relating to integrity, honesty and trust between people. Even so, my intimate knowledge of aspects of the school can also be regarded as part of what I bring to the research enterprise. All researchers, whether consciously or not, bring their own background into the research encounter, and a key part of methodological reflexivity is to acknowledge and account for this matter. More specifically, my evolving feminist consciousness, coupled with the experience of planning and doing the research, allowed the personal experiences, subjectivities and attitudes of both educational practitioners and myself, to be part of the focus of the study. These are all aspects that Reinharz (1992, pp. 2-3) recognises as belonging to the realm of feminist research practices. As I discuss below, methodological debates influenced by feminist and poststructuralist perspectives consider the role and influence of the researcher in shaping what is seen and heard, and examining the position and subjectivity of the researcher is an important part of the methodological analysis.

My role as a researcher is further influenced by my previous teaching roles in the school. As I undertook the research in my previous workplace, I had already formulated impressions as a former member within this community. These informal observations became the initial basis for my case study. Thus a crucial question is, "How am I positioned?" The very nature of my research means that I am obliged to be reflexive and declare my positioning within the study. It would be impossible to be distanced and context-free due to my past and present teaching experiences and interests, combined with my previous professional and personal involvement within the case study site. I am

positioned in the “twilight zone”, of not quite an insider researcher but as someone privy to the social and political machinations within the APS community. As a former teacher in the school, I developed both professional and personal relationships with the staff, including some with whom I still occasionally socialised during the two years prior to the data gathering process. I need to recognise the complexity of such social relations and my own location within these relationships (McLaren 2002). Sandra Harding (1989, p. 9), writes that:

The best feminist analysis ... insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research. That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint.

In the interests of personal professional development, the Principal had always encouraged APS staff to pursue both promotion and further study and was most amenable to the proposition via a telephone call that I utilise the school as my case study site. I next approached him through the formal university channels as I knew he would appreciate not only the protocol, but that it would also provide a professional distance for a gracious decline should he decide after reflection that my study proposal was inappropriate. Granted permission from not only APS but also from the relevant education department authorities, I approached the school staff via a formal letter of introduction to accompany a small presentation prior to the regular Monday afternoon Staff Meeting (I elaborate upon the research design later in this chapter). Even though it had been two years since my last staff meeting, it was strangely unnerving to attend as a guest and then leave, but this very act served as a marker that distinguished me as no longer part of the landscape of the school but as an outsider. Such a physical detachment also enabled teachers to decide whether or not they wished to participate. I admit to some disappointment when I reviewed my final participant list, for I had hoped certain teachers would volunteer for the study knowing that they had particular views on the notion of gifted students, professional development (PD) and the world of teaching.

Because I feared intruding, I did not ask any of the participants why they chose to assist, nor did I ask any of those I met later in my role as a representative of the Faculty of Education at my university workplace visiting students on school practicum, as to why they declined. I did not know all of the participants as some had taken up their positions at APS after I had left. Those I thought I did “know” I did not know at all because the semi-structured interviews took us along pathways we had never explored one-to-one. Our busy lives as teachers did not allow for the luxury of mulling over concepts and personal philosophies related to teaching and learning. Any out-of-school-hours coffee conversations dealt with more immediate issues and problems dealing with the tensions of in-house politics, student problems and parental concerns. It was a great privilege to be privy to the “inner professional” as in the public arena of the school site, many teachers chose to keep their inner professional guarded for fear of being found out, or exposed to the negative judgements of others, and even role played their acquiescence to authority.

To place myself on the same plane as the researched seems simultaneously easy and fraught with difficulty. But I became increasingly aware of the multiple positioning of the self and identity in the research process (Olesen 2000) and that my past involvement at APS provided insights and access to knowledge. Catherine Hakim (1987, p. 73) considers that interviews for case studies ‘often require the interviewer to demonstrate a good deal of prior knowledge of the subject [research topic]’ a criterion I meet from the general experience of my teaching background and my specific involvement at APS. Although I might share some attributes and perhaps some assumptions regarding gifted education and gender issues with my colleagues this, however, does not suffice as research. Also, I no longer had an insider’s privileged space, which would have entailed a different approach to the case study. By accepting work beyond the school setting, I destabilised my position as a professional colleague, becoming a more distant “other”. Some not so subtly indicated that such an act is a betrayal of the bonds of combined and shared experience. Such changes not only challenged our previous affiliations, but recast our relationship into that of a researcher and ‘those with whom research is done’ (Olesen 2000, p. 227). Reflecting upon her struggle with positioning,

Kath Weston (1996) writes that ‘a single body cannot bridge that mythical divide between insider and outsider, researcher and researched. I am neither, in any simple way, and yet I am both’ (Weston 1996, cited in Olesen, 2000, p. 227). It is this positioning and the issues of power and control that I address below.

Power, hierarchy and the researcher/researched relation

I suspect that it is impossible to create a non-hierarchical power relationship within the parameters of any type of research. Inequalities of control, authority and power exist in all facets of organisational life (Miller, Greenwood & Hinings 1997) and as Handy (1976) has noted, differences in objectives, ideologies and disputes over territory can create conflict in organisations. As such, my research, conducted as a former insider, might challenge organisational practices by creating a disturbance within the status quo, something that might be considered unsettling, by those whose views might be challenged by critical (self) reflection. Issues regarding power, as well as economics, history and exploitation, have been of concern to feminist researchers as they focus on the ‘methodological task ...[of] generating and refining [for] more interactive contextualised methods in search for pattern and meaning rather than prediction and control’ (Lather 1991, p. 18). But Hammersley (1992) speaks of control by ‘conventional researchers ... [as] restricted to the particular research project ... [as] the right to define the research topic, to decide to a large extent how and what data are to be collected, to do analysis and to write the research report’ (p. 196). With these views on researcher control in mind, I have a particular interest and a particular case that I wish to understand (Stake 1995). If my research is successful, I will be rewarded with an academic award in addition to great personal satisfaction but, as I have previously mentioned, such a process is not all mine either to claim or to control.

There are limitations and restrictions imposed upon the researcher, if not by ethical considerations, then by the circumstances of the research itself. Authors such as Hammersley (1992) and Stake (1995) have noted that researchers do not have permission to access all settings, potential interviewees or

information. The intrusions upon physical and personal space are generally limited and so, in terms of power, are not as great as that between teacher-student, employer-employee or professional-client (Hammersley 1992). I concur with Hammersley's opinion that the opposition by some feminists to all hierarchical relationships (Humm 1989) is both unreasonable and untenable. Both Hammersley and Stake feel that consideration and respect for differing viewpoints is a common courtesy, but not all personal realities are equally meritorious for inclusion into a qualitative case study. It is here that the researcher deliberately exercises her intellectual authority – indeed power – determining if material is to be included or excluded. To do otherwise is to deny the unique contribution of the researcher (Stake 1995) who brings attributes formed by personal history, gender, class and race to the research (Olesen 2000). Yet, by so saying, I enter into the complexity of feminist research that recognises that both the researcher and the participants are positioned by both their history and that their relationship is neither static nor context-free (Olesen 2000). I believe that it is nigh impossible to eradicate the paradox of power between the researcher and the researched, and what Olesen (1994) calls the 'intersubjectivity between the researcher and participant and the mutual creation of data' (p. 166). But if, as Flax (1994, p. 40) suggests, that one 'fundamental goal of feminist theory is ... to analyze gender relations ... and how we think, or equally important, do not think about them' then it will be the analysis of the shared human experience of those relations which might assist in seeking understanding about teachers' post professional practices as they relate to both gifted education and gendered distinctions in gifted programming.

Conceptual positioning

A particular research methodology is not implied by the term case study; rather it determines the form of the research (Adelman et al. 1976; Merriam 1998). Kenway et al. (1998, p. xv), argue that implementing change in schools 'is a complicated and even messy enterprise' a comment which is equally applicable to the research enterprise as elements from various approaches and fields can be borrowed and brought together. Indeed, Sue Middleton observes that the subject of education has been theoretically promiscuous, but that her

'own research toolkit includes concepts, strategies, and techniques pulled from phenomenology, neo-Marxism, and feminism, as well as Foucaultian poststructuralism' (Middleton 2003, p. 37). While tensions might arise from working with different conceptual traditions, these can also be understood as productive encounters. As Tamboukou and Ball (2003) suggest, 'researchers have a lot to gain from opening their minds to the yet 'unthought' and drawing upon and combining the possibilities of different theoretical and methodological traditions – thinking 'neo' and 'post' together' (Tamboukou & Ball 2003, p. 2). In this spirit, I too, have put together my own conceptual tool kit, selectively drawing on Foucault's work and feminist traditions to analyse my case study material.

As I am endeavouring to understand how individual teachers conceived or reconceived the intended aims of the *Bright Futures* "top down" policy process on their pedagogical practices and educational discourses, issues not only of language, but also of meaning, power, subjectivity and identity arise. My analysis of the views of teachers and school administrators is necessarily situated in an understanding of what they hold to be true about gifted education, gifted girls, their own and students' identities, personal perspectives and the discourses that arise from the interplay of past and present understandings. Such a position, as I explain below, guided me to both feminist and Foucauldian¹⁷ concepts.

My focus is upon a single or bounded school system, comprised coral like, of many constituent parts existing as not only an entity unto itself but within a broader social, cultural and governmental context or macro level. Feminist post-structural theory and the theoretical legacy of Michel Foucault provide me with a framework for examining the case at the micro level and considering how it is situated with the broader context of teachers' work. At first glance, coupling feminist and androcentric Foucauldian thought might appear oxymoronic; an irreconcilable tension. Indeed, I am not as gracious as many feminist authors (e.g. McNay 1992), who are generally positive about a

¹⁷ Authors vary in the usage of Foucaultian and Foucauldian. I have adopted the use of "d" following the French example.

feminist/Foucauldian coupling, and exonerate the androcentrism of Foucault's work as an unintentional act. In contrast, I believe that Foucault's work is firmly situated within the realm of male dominated post-structuralist thinking; he was informed by his readings of Nietzsche and Heidegger (see, for example, Foucault 1989a, 1989b, 1977; Peters 2003); and he developed his theses with a gender blindness in which the category of woman was subsumed within the male norm (see Macey 2004).

What, then, can Foucault offer to a feminist standpoint? Feminist authors have struggled with reconciling a feminist/Foucauldian union, and have queried its political value (Diamond & Quinby 1988). A large body of feminist scholarship has debated the merits of Foucault's contribution for understanding gender relations, with some rejecting its usefulness, others embracing it and yet others taking a more middle-road position in which elements of Foucault's work are adopted with other theoretical and political frameworks (see, for example, McLaren 2002; McLeod 1998, 1995; McNay 1994; Sawicki 1991; Weedon 1997). This latter approach characterises the position I have adopted. I have found key concepts and approaches associated with Foucault's oeuvre to be helpful in analysing the circulation of discourses about gifted education and the gifted child. I have attempted to bring together these concepts within a broadly feminist framework that foregrounds the salience of gender relations, identities and practices.

One justification for drawing from both feminist and Foucauldian inspired perspectives is derived from Foucault's (1989b) own argument concerning the shifting relations between previously distinct realms of thought. He argues that systems of reason, such as physics or mathematics or history, evolved from a philosophical communality or network but with the advent of post-structuralism, the 'separation, is being effaced or being reconstituted in another mode altogether ... works and progressions are formed in relation to one another and exist for one another' (p. 24). By analogy, a new relation, a new space has been created by feminists who, with their critical readings of Foucault, have added a feminist voice to his perspectives and pointed to some new ways in which his approaches, joined to a gender-based analysis, can

assist with interpreting diverse social and educational practices. Yet within these debates, the very question of what constitutes a “feminist perspective” warrants some discussion.

Feminist methodology/method

Feminist scholars select from a smorgasbord of methods and techniques (Stanley 1990), and it is hardly surprising that Harding (1987, p. 2) writes that ‘it is not at all clear what one is supposed to be looking for when trying to identify a distinctive “feminist method of research”’. This, she feels, is because method, methodology and epistemology have become hybridised as method in all discourses, which precludes both the identification and advancement of inquiry that is specifically feminist. For her argument, Harding defines method as techniques for gathering evidence, methodology as the theory and analysis of how research should proceed and epistemology as a theory of knowledge (Harding 1987, pp. 2-3) and argues for distinctive characteristics related to feminist analysis.

As Melanie Walker (Burns & Walker 2005) suggests, feminist research, going beyond method always raises ontological and epistemological issues that, in turn, raises the question of how to address ‘the vexed questions of a distinct feminist research method’ (Lather 1992, p. 91). Reinharz (1992) acknowledges the difficulties inherent in seeking absolutes. Instead, she focuses her attention on what ‘feminist research *includes*’ (p. 4; emphasis in original) as a perspective for guiding research that embraces all the available research methods, combined with the plurality of ‘women’s *ways* of knowing’ (p. 4; emphasis in original), rather than a woman’s way or a feminist’s way of approaching research. To emphasise her point, Reinharz entitled her book “Feminist *Methods* in Research”, as ‘feminists have used all existing methods and have invented some new ones as well’ (Reinharz 1992 p. 4; my emphasis in title), including, I would now add, approaches that embrace Foucauldian themes and concepts.

The argument that there is no distinctive feminist research method is further compounded by the claim that ‘there is no one set of feminist principles or

understandings beyond the very, very general ones to which feminists in every race, class, and culture will assent' (Harding 1987, p. 7) leading to the view that the term *feminisms* should be used to denote a diversity of views, even if often conflicting, within the paradigm (Olesen 1994). Such a diversity of positions can represent a rather bewildering challenge if one chooses to utilise feminist theories to explain, challenge and perhaps even alter existing, problematic gendered relationships - the latter point which is considered by Burns and Walker (2005) to be the crux of feminist research. However, particular feminist perspectives are related to established trends within political thought, which theorists and researchers have typically categorised into liberal, radical and socialist feminism (see, for example, Humm, 1989; McLeod 2001; Measor; 1992; Olesen, 1994; Reinhartz, 1992).¹⁸ Although these are conventionally considered to be the three principal perspectives, Measor and Sikes (1992) note that psychoanalytic feminism and postmodernist feminism are two other feminist categories but state that they have little relevance to education. However, I disagree with this claim, largely because schools are active participants in socialisation processes, and embedded within them, is the ongoing work of gender socialisation, identity construction and the development of sexual identity – processes which are a direct focus of enquiry for both psychoanalytic and postmodern theories. Further, one cannot so easily discount the impact of postmodernist/post-structural feminisms on education, and on cultural and social practice more broadly. More than a decade ago, Virginia Olesen argued (1994) that there was a 'steadily growing influence of deconstructive and postmodern studies, which often unsettles not only taken-for-granted male-oriented frames but the *feminist frames as well*' (p. 161; my emphasis). Elizabeth St. Pierre (2000) acknowledges that an 'uneasy tension ... was evident in the initial juxtaposition of feminism and poststructuralism' but that this tension has 'abated somewhat' (p. 477). In contrast to this stance, there are fears that feminism, by colluding with postmodernism is accepting its

¹⁸ According to Humm (1989), *liberal feminism* is 'the theory of individual freedom of women' and 'one of the main streams of feminist political and social theory' with the longest history (p. 118). *Radical feminism* enlarged upon the revolutionary social theory of the New Left, although some view the term in a metaphysical sense rather than socially or politically; whilst *socialist feminism* 'believes that women are second-class citizens in a patriarchal capitalism which depends for its survival on the exploitation of working people, and on the special exploitation of women (p. 213).

own demise before the completion of its own emancipatory work (Thornham 1998). The core tension here rests on the status of identity and human agency. For some feminists, the poststructuralist deconstruction of identity, as not essentialist or unitary, and questioning the possibility of agency, threatens to undermine the feminist political project because it challenges the very terms - woman, resistance, freedom - which have conventionally underpinned feminist political struggles (Nicholson 1991).

Olesen (2000), in a revised edition of her 1994 work, maintains that such disquietudes, first felt about thirty years ago, have not abated. Sharing Harding's belief that studies have been hybridised due to interdisciplinary borrowing, Olesen (2000), writes that feminist post-structuralist approaches continue for some to 'be at the least uncomfortable ... threatening and subversive' (p. 225); but the past 'styles of thought sharpened and enhanced the [then] emerging complexities: the sites (gender, race and class) of where and how "women" are controlled, how the multiple, shifting identities and selves that supplant earlier notions of a stable identity (self) are produced ... [that] they emphasized the shift away from binary frameworks to fluid conceptualizations of women's experiences, places, and spaces' (pp. 225-226). Such a process might well continue to be unsettling, but its challenge to all aspects of 'beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self and language' (Flax 1987, p. 624) cannot be underestimated in the ongoing discussions regarding gender relations and existing theories.

While these disputes are part of the broader context of feminist enquiry in education, they are noted here as background to my study rather than identified as its primary focus. Although cognisant of these debates, this case study is not directly concerned with delineating the finer points and distinctions among varying types of feminist politics and theory. I take from post-structuralist debates a focus on the effects of discourses and on how identities are constructed through social as well as educational discourses. For example, my analysis of teachers' views on gifted education sheds light on the nature and impact of dominant discourses and truths about gifted education and the gifted child, and reveals how both teachers' and students' identities are shaped by

these discourses. Although there are differing and often conflicting feminisms, there remains a commonality or shared view that gender, as an identity, social relation and category, influences the functions of all aspects of society. This generous and inclusive understanding of what constitutes a feminist perspective informs my study. As Humm argues (1989, p. xiv), ‘most feminists refuse to categorise feminism’ as the very process limits rather than enhances linguistic alternatives, difference and experience.

Feminist theory, then, with its ‘crucial and original contribution to contemporary thinking’ (Humm 1989, p. x) will provide ‘a perspective [to my] educational inquiry rather than a particular research method’ (Gough & McLeod 2001, p. 1). Such a perspective informs both my methodological and theoretical approaches by putting the social constructions of gender at the centre of my research (Gough 2001). However, as noted above, neither case study approaches nor feminisms nor Foucauldian concepts offer prescriptive models, but instead offer conceptual frameworks for investigations that can be mobilised, drawn upon and borrowed from for particular studies. Thus, the nature of the issues and problems under investigation, and the emergent themes from the data, in turn morph into questions to be asked of both the research material and the case study within a feminist/Foucauldian framework. As Olesen (1994, p. 158) notes, feminists use a variety of qualitative styles, and by so doing, ‘share the assumptions held generally by qualitative or interpretive researchers that interpretive human actions ... can be the focus of research’. It becomes feminist research by situating the social construction of gender at the forefront of the inquiry (Lather 1992).

Foucauldian positioning

In this thesis I am selecting and employing key Foucauldian concepts and themes as a means of viewing the case study school and teacher praxis following the *Bright Futures* professional development program. The key concepts and theoretical lenses I am adopting in my analysis are: discourses and regimes of truth; normalisation and classification of populations; and surveillance/self surveillance. These have been useful “conceptual tools” for examining the dilemmas posed by my research and observations. My apparent

opportunism in this matter is similar to other “tool borrowers” who have not embraced a particular oeuvre in its totality (O’ Farrell 2005). For example, Pat Thomson, using an ‘eclectic mix of theoretical tools’ (1998, p. 6) accepts Foucault’s invitation to utilise his writings in a utilitarian manner or as ‘little tool boxes ... [to] break up systems of power’ (Foucault 1989, p. 149 cited in Thomson 1998, p. 6). In being selective, I realise that, on the one hand, I might be performing an injustice to Foucauldian thought by adapting themes for my own purposes, thereby risking the loss of original meaning through de-contextualisation. On the other hand, I am extending and adapting useful concepts and ways of seeing to understand complex social and educational practices, and as such contributing to understandings of identity and contemporary educational “truths”.

Further, the overall study is motivated by historical interests, and by a desire to understand some of the historical context for current practices and discourses about gifted education. First, the case study offers an account of the recent history of those practices, based on fieldwork conducted in the early 2000s, which asked teachers to also reflect on policy and program developments in the 1990s. Second, it seeks to place contemporary discourses and understandings about giftedness in an historical perspective, and to show some of the antecedents to current thinking about gifted education. In this respect, the study is guided by an interest in understanding the “history of the present”. This Foucauldian concept can be summarised here as a concern with examining the contexts, circumstances and discourses – the “conditions of possibility” – that shape the present, with a focus on analysing how what is familiar about the present came to be so. A history of the present also involves unsettling and deconstructing what is taken for granted in the present as “common sense” and tracing how certain views and discourses became to be seen as inevitable and as “natural”.

According to Clare O’Farrell (2005, p. 71), Foucault examined ‘the past in order to throw light on contemporary “problems”’. In beginning a history of the present, Foucault posed the questions: “‘what are we and what are we today? What is this instant that is ours?’” (O’Farrell 2005, p. 72). A history of

the present is more than simply a ‘diagnosis, it is also an intervention’ (O’Farrell 2005, p. 72). In other words, Foucault sought to focus on the present, to expose its contingency and specific problems, while at the same time examine the antecedents to current practices and “truths”. Through his histories, he showed ‘particular areas of human experiences became problems at specific times in history’ (O’Farrell 2005, p. 72). Guided by this approach, I examine the antecedents to current discourses about gifted education and the gifted child, simultaneously attempting to show the influence and persistence of certain beliefs and to argue that such socially-constructed truths and so-called common sense are not inevitable and that other ways of seeing might, and should, be possible. I now turn to explain the key Foucauldian concepts that make up my theoretical tool kit.

Key Foucauldian concepts for this study

Discourses and regimes of truth

Discourse is a central concept in Foucauldian analysis: discourses are united bodies of thought, techniques, practices and rules often captured in writing (but not only in language per se). Analysis of discourse concerns not only the content of *what* can be said, but how, by whom, when and where and with what authority (Ball 1990). Discourses concern ‘the speaking subject, those connected with power relations, and those internal to the discourse itself’ (Simola et al. 1998, p. 65); they are value laden, containing ideas and statements which reflect the principles and standards describing acts that provide a means or a window for “seeing” and “sense making” (Webb, Schirato & Danaher 2002). Mary Klages (2001) understands that Foucauldian discourses are shaped by commonalities, be they derived from objects of study, methodologies, terms or ideas which then allows for analysis and discussion from a range of historical periods, countries, texts, disciplines and genres.

Describing discourses ‘as practices obeying certain rules’ (Foucault 1972, p. 138), Foucault said that they ‘are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe’ (Foucault 1972, p. 49; emphasis in original). Thus,

Foucault not only regards discourses as defining and ordering what is said and unsaid but that they become the ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault 1972, p. 49). He is also insistent that discourses are beyond the very structure of language. When examined, discourses can reveal the underlying structures and relationships between meaning, knowledge, power and identity, as they go beyond speech and thoughts, noting just who is permitted to speak, when and by what authority. By so doing they ‘embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations’ (Ball 1990, p. 2). Further, certain discourses or discursive clusters operate more powerfully than others. This connects to Foucault’s conception of “regimes of truth”, which refers to historically specific mechanisms which produce and organise dominant discourses and rules that operate as powerful mechanisms separating “the true” from “the false” with specific powers accorded to the “true” (O’Farrell 2005).

The realm of gifted education is governed by its own discursive practices about who can speak and what can be said, but even within these, struggles for a dominant discourse or regime of truth are exerted. In educational practice, “regimes of truth” can be understood as the accepted professional commonsense, the dominant truths that shape and govern teaching thinking and practice (Popkewitz & Brennan 1998). A recent example of a prevailing regime of truth regarding research on gifted education is evident in an invitation ‘calling for all giftedness researchers’ to join the “Giftedness Researchers’ Support & Discussion Forum”. The stated prerequisite for membership is that one must be ‘carrying out empirical or clinical research in the giftedness field, in association with a university, school, psychology practice or similar’ (Valpied 2007, p. 54). ‘[A]ll giftedness researchers’ are not included, as it seems that only the quantitative researcher is privileged, holds the “truth” and is permitted into the club. Applying these arguments about regimes of truth to the case study school, this also refers to a concern with the selection and propagation of certain educational and political discourses (Ball 1990, p. 3), as administrators focus on implementing specific education department policies, such as the *Bright Futures* gifted policy before having their attention drawn to the next policy initiative, usually at the behest of a new

government. For Foucault (1971, p. 46 cited in Ball 1990, p. 3) '[E]very educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them'. Throughout this thesis, but especially in Chapters Two, Four, Five and Six I explore some of the underpinning and influential regimes of truth regarding gifted education, both in the professional, scholarly and policy literature and in their articulation and negotiation at the case study school.

Normalisation and classification of populations

In Chapter Two, I examined historically the circulation of discourses and regimes of truth regarding the concepts of intelligence, giftedness and talent. Linked to this has been the use of technologies, or specific practices, such as hierarchical observations, normalising judgements and the classification of populations as the instruments by which power is developed and maintained. This is evident, for example, by the use of psychometric tests that statistically sort people, and so locates those who are gifted compared to the "normal" population, or by teachers who objectify students by viewing them as a disembodied cohort requiring discipline. In turn, the teachers themselves become objectified by education departments that employ principals as their surveyors to administer annual reviews to ensure compliance.

Normalisation, according to Foucault (1977b, p. 183) 'compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, [and] excludes'. Normalising judgement, as evidenced by the development of a measurable intelligence with the nineteenth century work of Galton in Britain and Binet in France played a crucial role in the development of a formal and standardised education system (see Chapter Four of this thesis for an Australian historical perspective). As noted in Chapter Two, Binet's work ignited the measurement movement in America and England, which assessed, then compared and ordered individuals based on their mental acuity, and this was instrumental in the development of the concept of giftedness. Formal education, in tandem with developing psychological discourses, became an arena for dividing practices with schools moulding, maintaining and regulating conformity by not only sorting students according to their cognitive capacity, but also by a form of personal

government which subjected students to a range of micro-penalties for behavioural misdemeanours related to:

time (latenesses, absences, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body ('incorrect' attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency) (Foucault 1977b, p. 178).

However, within such practice of regulation and normalisation, it also recognises variation and the existence of differences, such as for those who might be considered gifted. For although normalisation

imposes homogeneity; ... it [also] individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within the system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences (Foucault 1977b, p. 184).

Thus, whether one is an adherent of a unitary or multi-dimensional notion of intelligence, the dominant discourse of intelligence assumes that within any population there will be those who fall into the category labelled gifted.

Informing the development of formal schooling was educational psychology, which Gordon Tait (2001) describes as the largest of all 'girders in a conceptual framework built around the humanist mantra that all pupils are individuals, each with individual needs, responses and abilities' (p. 93). However, contradictory practices of identifying differences in ability by examination when classes are based upon age groupings, which should equate with homogeneity, causes problems when teachers are charged with dealing with and normalising their students. Foucault also finds himself in such a bind as he recognises that schools function as sites of normalisation whilst simultaneously recognising difference. Such tensions between normalisation and difference or between a common or differentiated form of educational provision persist today, and, as I discuss in later chapters, emerges in the views of case study respondents, as well as in formal and informal policy and program documents.

Surveillance/self surveillance

A panoptic view permits an observer to maintain an all seeing gaze which, for the observed appears unrelenting, as there is no means of ascertaining whether or not one is being scrutinised. Although the '[G]aze watches for disorder, anticipates the danger of crime, penalizing every deviation' (Foucault 1980, p. 72) and might or might not punish or reward accordingly, the ramification of constant surveillance leads to a self regulation of populations be they employees, school students or those incarcerated in prisons or asylums (O'Farrell 2005). For Foucault, '[T]he Panoptic system was not so much confiscated by the State apparatuses, rather it was these apparatuses which rested on the basis of small scale, regional, dispersed Panoptisms (Foucault 1980, p. 72). This is evident in the nineteenth century development of a centralised education system in Victoria, which, although ultimately responsible for governing and administering schools, set in train a system of regional bureaucracies overseeing principals and teachers, who, in turn, used the examination system to classify and sort their students (see, for example, Barcan 1980; Braggett 1985; Cleverley & Lawry 1972; Marginson 1997). Thus, the predominant social and political assumptions of that period concerning education eventually became normalised through panoptic mechanisms. These are still evident today, seen for example in outcomes-based curriculum whereby teachers constantly monitor and evaluate student performance through observation plus the powerful technology of formal examinations. Teaching staff are also subject to extensive appraisals and reporting. According to Foucault (1977b, p. 186), historical precedents established schools as a site of

uninterrupted examination that duplicated along its entire length the operation of teaching. It became less and less a question of jousts in which pupils pitched their forces against one another and increasingly a perpetual comparison of each other and all that made possible to measure and judge.

The Foucauldian concepts discussed here, each emphasising issues of power, discipline, regulation and truth, shed light on how systems of power and the "knowing" of particular populations, individually or collectively, operate such as within the case study site. By listening to the research participants, then

analysing and interpreting the transcripts as well as related school and education department documents, I draw on these Foucauldian concepts to examine the regimes of truth reflected in educational and gifted discourses as they relate to surveillance, (individual performance reviews; school reviews), normalisation (student examinations; classifying populations) and training (professional development).

In summary the conceptual and methodological framework of the study is intended to enable me to develop a context-bound critical perspective for examining the case within the two bounded systems of the education department and the school; to critique the concept of giftedness as it evolved within the scientific framework of normalisation, which ordered and classified populations and was integral the development of formal, compulsory education; and to examine the limits of dominant regimes of truths which govern giftedness, gifted education and the world of teachers' work – including teachers' professional development. By critically examining the effects of micro and macro power relations within the case-study site, I attempt to reflexively locate my research within the political dimension of research which recognises that people can consciously act to change their circumstances, but that their ability to do so rests upon various social, cultural and political constraints, as well as the traces and influences of historical discourses and practices. I now turn to explain the research design and the practicalities of conducting this case study.

The research design

A research design method incorporates the techniques, processes and specific research practices used for gathering and/or creating the data and its implementation. There are, according to Harding (1987), only three principal methods of social enquiry: conversations, observations and examination of written records and I explain how the evidence for the case study was gleaned and constructed using these fundamental techniques. I also discuss any potential ethical dilemmas or challenges which partially constitute the conduct of both the research participants and me as researcher in this study as well as the eventualities of the research experience.

Legal and ethical requirements

As discussed, I wished to conduct the case-study in my former work place, and initially made phone contact with the Principal to ascertain his interest or otherwise in supporting the research project. Having gained his in principle support, in June 2002, formal permissions were sought from my University Ethics Committee and the Department of Education, Employment and Training Victoria to conduct research in a State Government School. Once granted, I sought written approval from the Principal to proceed with the research. Given permission, I addressed the school staff about my research prior to the formal commencement of the school's regular Monday afternoon staff meeting. At this meeting, I detailed my proposal and method as well as briefly outlining my research methodology. I explained the two fold purpose for recording and transcribing the conversations: firstly, to provide a personal hard copy for each participant to allow for modifications of their contribution if they so desired, and secondly, that the transcripts would become data for my research analysis. I stressed that each participant would remain anonymous, by being allocated a number and a pseudonym. Individual presentation folders containing the Plain Language Statement, Consent Form and explanatory letter were left for each teacher to peruse and consider at their leisure. One large postage envelope was also provided in which to place sealed individual consent forms and contact details which I collected one week later from the school.

The participants

Initially, from a staff of 41 (43 including the speech pathologist and educational psychologist who are assigned by the education department to a cluster of schools), 13 participants (12 teachers and 1 educational psychologist), including the Principal and Assistant Principal agreed to be involved in the case study. However, once the interviews commenced three more teachers volunteered to participate (see Table 3.2 below). Averaging 48 and therefore above the mean age of almost 43 years for primary school teachers in Victorian Government schools (VAGO 2002), their ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the mid-sixties. All the participants had at least two years of general primary classroom teaching experience. For some, this experience was prior to specialisation, and for others, after and/or interspersed

during time spent pursuing differing educational pathways, specialisations or promotional positions. Since the interviews, six participants have either retired or taken prolonged leave, although one of the retirees continues to be involved in teaching English as Second Language (ESL) away from the school site.

Participant pseudonym/interview number/gender	Age range	Years teaching/school involvement	Seniority level (as applicable 2002)	Years at APS	Other teaching experience	Bright Futures PD
Jeff - 1/M	45-49	24	LT3	5	Teacher Release to Industry Program (TRIP)	yes
Louise - 2/F	40-44	13	LT1	5	Adult ESL; rural Victoria	yes
Melanie - 3/F	40-44	21	ETWR	16	Unstated	yes
Helen - 4/F	45-49	29	LT1	10	Special Development School; Art specialist	yes
Assistant Principal - 5/F	55-59	34	Principal Class	4	Schools for the Deaf; secondary school	yes
Maria - 6/F	30-34	8	LT1	8	LOTE	yes
Celeste - 7/F	25-29	4	LT1	4		no
Fleur - 8/F	50-54	31 (3 years teaching in primary classroom)	Educational psychologist		Guidance Officer; Student Services; Schools for the Deaf/Blind	no
Tamsin - 9/F	55-59	35	ETWR	20	Canada & England	yes
Janet - 10/F	35-39	16	LT1	3	Instrumental music; rural Victoria	no
Marjorie - 11/F	50-54	35	LT1	10		yes
Principal - 12/M	60-64	44	Principal Class	14	Rural Victoria	yes
Judith - 13/F	55-59	23	ETWR	8	Geelong area	yes
Pam - 14/F	45-49	unstated	LT2	3	Library specialist	no
Ruth - 15/F	60-64	44	LT1	20	ESL	no
Eric - 16/M	40-44	15	LT1	15	Science specialist; musician	yes

Table 3.2: Summary of participant educational experiences

Design and procedure

Semi-structured individual interviews (see Appendix 2 for interview guidelines and prompts) were conducted between 15th October 2002 and 17th January 2003. This time period fell into Term 4 of the scholastic year, one of the busiest for Victorian teachers who are engaged in formal testing, report writing and end-of-year productions as well as their regular classroom duties. Most

(13) of the interviews were conducted in various locations at Atlas Primary School, such as meeting rooms or offices. Two participants, one of whom was on long service leave, and one former full-time but now part-time teacher, elected to do the interviews at my workplace. One interview was conducted in my home during the vacation period, due to the teacher's involvement in extra-curricular school productions which absorbed his non-teaching time (designated for planning and preparation) during Term 4. To preserve anonymity, the case study participants are referred to by pseudonyms; direct quotes by the participants are cited according to the order in which the interviews took place. For example, "Jeff", the first interviewee, is cited as "1" and "Eric", the last as 16". Re-recorded interviews are noted with "b". The page numbers refer to where the quote is found in the transcript.

Data creation

The principal means of creating data was from the semi-structured interviews, each lasting about an hour, which I recorded with a Sony digital mini-disc recorder. These were transcribed, half by me and half by an employee of Media Monitors with whom I made a private arrangement. A final copy of the transcript was sent to each participant for perusal, comment and verification. Only two participants edited and returned their transcripts; their annotations have been incorporated as requested. I took the silence of the other participants as assent to utilise the document as transcribed.

In addition to the data created from the semi-structured interviews, I drew upon: my personal collection of APS documents and journal notes collected during my teaching period at the school (1994-1999); the school website for the duration of this research; observations written as field notes whilst visiting the school both in my capacity as a University lecturer visiting education students undertaking practicum experience and as a researcher; plus personal communications.

Challenges and frustrations

Schools are hectic places and teachers are busy people. Although research permissions had been attained from the relevant bodies by August 2002,

interviews did not commence until mid-October. The intervening September school holidays and the contact times provided by the participants did not guarantee availability to negotiate an interview time. However, appointments, once made were honoured save for two occasions when interviews were cancelled due to other pressing commitments or illness. Two interviews were repeated due to recording failure, one because of a power surge that interfered with the recording process and the other as a result of researcher incompetence; three participants could not participate for a full hour due to urgent work issues.

Many interruptions disrupted the flow of discussions undertaken at the school site. The “normal” school events accompanied by the natural boisterousness of children as they moved about the school site created challenging sound-scapes. Teachers and children alike ignored the “Please do not disturb: Interview in progress” sign on the door and barged into the interview room regardless; the Principal constantly interrupted with his frequent usage of the broadcasting system; the designated meeting room had to be vacated because of maintenance; parent helpers conversed loudly whilst doing their tasks despite working next to the occupied interview room; the PE teacher continuously blew his whistle directly outside the interview room whilst marshalling his charges and the Assistant Principal, also ignoring the “Please do not disturb”, sign bustled into a classroom during one interview whilst pursuing her school furniture audit. My own home as an interview site was not immune from similar noisy interruptions. The only time the final participant had available was during my annual carpet steam cleaning session. This list of noises and interruptions is particularly relevant to me as a researcher as I am hearing impaired, and such background noise created additional pressures and frustrations in trying to listen attentively and capture subtleties of verbal expression. In order to counter these impacts, I took extensive field notes after the interviews, listened to the tape recordings several times, and of course re-visited the transcripts many times.

The writing process

Transcribing the interviews was an active process that, in conjunction with the interview itself, became the first step in analysis and interpretation. Transcription began soon after conducting the first interview. Although valuable, I soon realised that the time required transcribing sixteen interviews, some more than an hour in duration, was proving to be a lengthy and time consuming process, a challenge when one is also working in fulltime employment. To expedite matters, so participants could receive their transcript in a timelier manner, I sought outside assistance from a professional transcriber.

Analysis

Analysis commenced with conducting, listening to, and transcribing the first interview. The guiding questions served as the original broad headings for organising data, but other discrete categories began to emerge. When all the transcriptions were complete, N-Vivo (QSR N6) was utilised for a text search to seek, collect and sort the exact participant responses according to the identified categories. This exercise was useful for its rapidity and accuracy in finding the precise location of specific words and phrases. However, it was by revisiting the interview recordings or by rereading the transcripts that prominent themes and concerns were finessed.

Analysis of qualitative data is an evolving process and it is not a simple matter of “applying” a theoretical or thematic grid over data or findings. It involves moving back and forwards between the data, the research literature and theoretical frameworks. In describing her method of analysis in an ethnographic study of American youth, Lois Weis (2004) explains the coding and thematic categories were established after reading about a quarter of the transcripts. These categories ‘became labels through which the data could be chunked and analyzed’ and these ‘empirically developed coding categories were added to theoretically driven codes’ (Weis 2004, p. 188). I adopted a similar process. The empirically derived themes included: teacher knowledge; the gifted child; policy change and implementation; staff surveillance; school culture; family and community and gender differentiation. The theoretically

driven themes included: discourses; gender; normalisation and regimes of truth. My analysis of the interviews and the case study material overall developed in this ongoing and reflective method of dialogue between theoretical and empirical themes.

Conclusion

The theoretical tools that I have selected for this case study serve my interest in developing a Foucauldian “history of the present”, which is explained by Gary Gutting (1994, p. 10) as ‘an understanding of the past to understand something that is intolerable in the present’. This is not to presume that the case study has been motivated by an intolerable situation, but rather that it focuses on the circumstances which might lead to a better understanding of certain issues for the education of the gifted. Problematization of a situation at the grassroots level is understood by O’Farrell (2005) as the means by which people, either individually or collectively, deal with their common problems pertaining to a particular time and place to assist in their comprehension of the present situation; the solutions eventually becoming anonymous and part of practice. O’Farrell (2005, p. 70), says that Foucault is not trying to identify when a specific concept appears, or even write the history of a period or institution. Rather, his quest is to examine the history of thought which he describes as ‘the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience or set of practices which were accepted without question ... becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behaviour, habits, practices and, institutions’ (Foucault 2001, p. 74.)

One of the aspects I explore in this case study is the effect of top-down government initiatives, such as the *Bright Futures*, on predominantly female practitioners who, in many settings, such as Atlas Primary School, are chiefly governed by male leaders. In 1999, 80% of teachers at APS were female; in 2002 this had dropped slightly to 75.5%, figures consistent with Australian national data (McKenzie 2008 p. 13). Linking Foucauldian and feminist analyses to a case study of one particular school setting and its implementation of the *Bright Futures* initiative might reveal not only the particular roles of the players, but also the nature of the relationship between gender and power in

this particular instance. I speculate that these relationships and gender imbalances, and the broader “gender culture” within the school, might have had some influence on the gender inequities of students selected for gifted programs. Understanding and illuminating such processes, could in turn, shed light on these relationships in other schools and education systems. As Walker (Burns & Walker 2005, p. 66) states ‘feminist research aspires to be for women as much as it is about women’, thus as a woman, examining for the most part, a female workplace, this case study provides a space and opportunity for all the participants, female and male, to freely express themselves beyond the usual fora of staff and level meetings scaffolded by hierarchical structures and agendas that often serve to restrict independent voices by the very configurations of power that exist within the school. The notion of voice, of being heard, is a central tenet to feminist methodologies (Burns & Walker 2005). It is at this very location that feminist thinking, which examines the issues of authority and its allied processes through inclusion and the voices of all the participants, can contribute to the gap within Foucauldian discourse, a discourse which fails to consider how masculinist authority, language and reason has silenced and marginalised women.

I now turn in Chapter Four, to examine aspects of the history of educational provision in Australia, with a particular emphasis on the gifted education movement in Victoria. This will serve to historically contextualise the translations and enactments of the *Bright Futures* gifted policy at the case study school.

Chapter Four

Historical and political context in Australia and the State of Victoria

In this chapter I map some of the educational concerns and policy themes that form part of a wider historical context for understanding the circulation of contemporary discourses and policies on gifted education. While there remains much to be done in this area, a detailed history is beyond the scope of this chapter and the focus of the overall thesis. The following discussion draws on the work of a number of historians of education and key scholars who have examined the historical development of gifted education in Australia. A number of recurring themes and apparently persistent tensions can be traced which, I suggest, continue to shape the design, rationale and reception of gifted education policies and associated teacher professional development programs. I characterise these as struggles over the relationship between universalism and differentiation, and between egalitarianism and elitism. In order to set the scene for elaborating this argument, this chapter begins with a brief discussion of the establishment of educational provisions for *all* students, where the case for universal education is strongly made, alongside debates regarding education for children designated as different or in need of a different type of education. The burgeoning discipline of psychology informed Australian educators but the notion of giftedness was received with apprehension, the effects of which are manifest to the present day. I discuss how a neo-liberal government which instigated a purportedly market driven outcomes-based form of education also recognised gifted students with Victoria's first gifted education policy; *Bright Futures*. This in turn necessitated professional development in order for Victorian teachers to reconceptualise classroom practices.

Education for all

A compulsory, free, secular education was introduced by degrees into the Australian colonies between 1852 and 1908 (Braggett 1985). Victoria, with the Education Act of 1872 (Government of Victoria 2005; Legislative Council 1872) was the first colony to introduce a free, secular and compulsory

education. School attendance became obligatory for all children aged between six and fifteen (DET Victoria 2002); the goal of compulsory education for all students met with mixed reactions, and truancy among pupils was common. To regulate both enrolment and attendance, inspectorial teams dealt with non-compliance and truancy. These acts of surveillance rapidly became naturalised, bureaucratising education from the onset of the Act (Theobald 1990). Austin (1972, p. 239), states that managing truancy was ‘a hopeless battle against the native cunning of the children, the hostility of their parents and the complete inadequacy of their [truancy officers] information’ to enforce compulsory attendance. Businesses, local boards and factory owners, accustomed to using cheap child labour also collaborated against authorities. Bogus private schools were established whereby a child could mark daily attendance en route to work (Austin 1972, p. 240). Inspection, as a form of social regulation reinforced what, for some authors (for example, Wight 2003), view as the original intent of Australian schooling. According to Wight (2003), the opening of the first school in the penal colony of NSW in 1789, was a strategy deployed by the ruling elite to control and influence the free born children of convicts, who, it was believed, had inherited the same attitudes and behaviours of their deported parents.

Thus, I suggest that the notion of egalitarianism, particularly in Australian education is a self perpetuating myth. The state schooling offered to the burgeoning population in the early days contrasted with the education available to more wealthy individuals, who, mimicking English ruling class practices, initially employed tutors for their children before private schools were established. The underclass of so called “ragged” or “gutter” children were excluded from any form of educational opportunity on the basis of unkempt appearance, their presumed harmful influence over other children or because these children, as noted, were already working for their very survival. If girls were fortunate enough to attend school, it was to prepare them for servitude in the domestic economy (see Barcan 1984; Welch 1997; Wight 2003). Such educational practices reflected the social and gender inequalities manifest in white society since the colonies were established.

Parallel to the development of state managed “public schools”, “private schools” emerged in communities with the motives and the where-with-all to pay, reflecting social order, profession, class status, faith and geographical locale (Potts 2005; Seddon 2004). Frydenberg and O’Mullane (2000), suggest that it was the corresponding development of the middle class and the democratisation of education in Australia from the mid-1800s that led to the state forming partnerships ‘with families to formalize the process of recognizing and developing both intellectual ability and domain-based talent’ (p. 78), a somewhat generous statement, as from the inception of state controlled education in Victoria to the present day, the state has maintained overall control of public education (see, for example, Legislative Council 1872; Pascoe & Pascoe 1998).

Eddie Braggett argues (1985), that so well did the founders of state education do their work, their influence continues in current school curriculum and school organisational practices. Principally, these were the establishment of a mandated course of instruction for the school year, minimum standards of attendance enforced by inspection and the adoption of whole-class teaching premised on the notion that not only was children’s cognitive development similar, thus age related, but that it progressed in a fixed, sequential order. Thus ‘[U]niformity and conformity in education were desirable ... individual differences were downplayed or were not accepted; classes were organised on the assumption that all children were capable of learning the same work in the same time; and the one teaching method was applicable to the entire class’ (Braggett 1985, p. 10). Perhaps influenced by Fordism in the United States, by the 1920s, Australian state education was captivated by the notion of uniformity for ‘courses, standards, methods [and] books’ (Turney 1972, p. 34) in the belief that it ‘ensured equality of educational provision and more effective and economical administration’ (Turney 1972, p. 34), even though ‘[P]rescribed courses tested by inspectors virtually placed Australian teachers in a pedagogical straitjacket’ (Turney 1972, p. 34). Thus skilled teaching during the 1920s became equated with giving a ‘good class lesson’ (Turney 1972, p. 53), especially in the core curriculum of the “3Rs” - reading, writing and arithmetic. The theme of universal and compulsory education was

accompanied by - implicitly or explicitly - a commitment to the value of a common way of teaching, and a common curriculum for all children, organised according to age groupings and not overtly differentiated in other ways.

Yet compulsory education was also accompanied by a belief in the capacity of a universal education to foster the abilities of those who previously might have been neglected, their talents unrealised. Queensland's Inspector-General for Education in 1912 opined that one function of a universal education was to nurture potential in 'the latent seeds of genius which would otherwise perish unfulfilled or be born to blush unseen in poverty and insecurity' (MacIntyre 1990 cited in Marginson 1997, p. 37). This sentiment reflected the influence of psychology on notions of equality of educational opportunity, as well as the influence of human capital and economic arguments regarding education's potential benefits.

Psychological knowledge and differentiating the student population

Influenced by both English and American ideas, Australia was not immune to the expanding sphere of psychology, with its regulatory practices of ranking and classifying populations (Damousi 2005, see also Rose 1991). This influence is evident across a range of practices in the early 20th century, for example, a 1911-1912 national survey that sought to determine the prevalence of "feeble-mindedness" in Australian children (McCallum 1990) or the 1919 adaptation of Binet's tests of mental ability to Australian conditions (Turney 1972). David McCallum (1990) identifies the 1911-1912 survey as 'an important moment in incorporating the teaching profession into the science of mental operations and mental measurement' (p. 18) – classic techniques of psychology - as teachers and not the medical profession administered the tests. Although resistance to the survey was met in the states of Queensland, WA, NSW and many private schools, Victoria participated with enthusiasm, and the results led to the Victorian Education Department establishing a special school for the feeble-minded and mentally defective in the working class suburb of Fitzroy in Melbourne in 1914 (McCallum 1990).

Teaching to individual differences

Although formal teaching approaches prevailed in Australia, during the first two decades of the 20th century some teachers and teacher educators, aware of the new psychologies related to developmental differences and the work of humanist educators such as Maria Montessori and John Dewey, began to implement the progressive ideals of individualised instruction and progression based on learning readiness (Barcan 1980; Turney 1972). T. H. Lovell, a Professor of Psychology at the University of Sydney contributing to a 1932 Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) publication, advocated a child focused curriculum believing that, '[T]he present prescription which marks the curriculum must give way to elasticity. Elasticity will be ineffective where the teacher is not free: the teacher must be free if the pupil is to be free ... [E]ven so, he [sic] will not be free unless the autocratic domination of the inspectorate gives way to an enlightened co-operation with the teacher (Lovell, 1932 p. 26 cited in Turney 1972, p. 49. A Miss Simpson, who became the first female inspector in NSW, advocated the Montessori system because it 'is well suited to the educational needs of a free, democratic country like Australia, where self-reliance, individuality, resource, originality, and freshness of thought are qualities much desired in future citizens' (Simpson 1914, cited in Turney, 1972 p. 56). Despite advocacy for change, implementation was difficult. As Turney (1972) observed 'State education in Australia has never been a fertile bed for educational experiment' (p. 55). During the 1920s, although educational theories, albeit modified, were implemented into teaching practices in both State and church schools in NSW and Victoria, programs such as the Dalton Laboratory Plan, based upon the Montessorian ideals of freedom, self-education and individualised learning programs, were adapted to conform to entrenched teaching routines. This was done to the extent that capable students completing work assigned for the week were not extended or moved to work with cognitive peers, but were hobbled by additional repetitive tasks such as arithmetic cards and supplementary readers, whilst their slower age peers caught up (Barcan 1980; Turney 1972).

The difficulty to implement individualised learning and teaching approaches exemplifies that educational ideals held by teachers for their students were

frequently in conflict with, and arrested by, actual school and classroom practices of the period. Any innovations soon withered when dealing with large classes of up to seventy students - a number so large that it made it impossible for teachers to instigate individual learning programs. Practices such as the lock-step annual promotion of students, grade level courses interpreted as the minimum standard for achievement, an emphasis on the 3Rs, the impracticality or unwillingness of teachers to relinquish classroom control in favour of facilitation and the surveillance of standards enforced by a government system of inspection did not encourage humanistic teaching approaches. Plus, many teachers were unwilling to work beyond the minimum time requirement, a habit that impeded the labour intensive preparation required to implement progressive educational ideals which focused on individual student learning needs (see Braggett 1985; Turney 1972).

However, in 1924, the six Directors of State Education in Australia decided that 'it would be sound educational policy to gather together children of mental ability much above the average' because 'the supernormal child often finds the class work so simple that there is not sufficient call upon him [sic] for mental effort' (Tasmanian Archives, ED73, 1924 cited in Braggett 1985, p. 11). Returning to Australia in 1928 after studying under John Dewey and Edward Thorndike at Teachers College, New York (www adb), Kenneth Stewart Cunningham recommended that the Education Department of Victorian commence special classes for gifted children (Turney 1972). Later, in 1939, Cunningham became the inaugural director of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

Although special classes for gifted students were introduced into schools in Victoria, NSW, Tasmania and Western Australia during the 1930s, not all were officially sanctioned by their respective education departments (Braggett 1985). There was however, a growing recognition of the educational neglect of gifted students, and was a topic raised at a teachers' conference in 1931 (McRae 1931, p. 15 cited in Turney 1971, p. 71). Nonetheless, although Australian teachers' colleges were influenced by the advocates of measurement and scholastic groupings, Australian education in the period 1920-1945

remained resolute in maintaining practices ‘characterised by sameness, by uniformity, by the lack of challenge, the influence of examinations, and the acceptance of older methods and ideas’ (Braggett 1985, p. 13).

Individualism versus egalitarianism

This professional orientation to “sameness” perhaps reflects what Gross (2004) calls the ‘extreme egalitarianism’ (p. 31) that is widely regarded as deeply embedded into the Australian psyche influencing many aspects of social and political life. This is not to argue that Australian society itself is actually egalitarian in form and function any more than any other Western democracy with predominantly English cultural antecedents, or that similar attitudes are not to be found elsewhere in, for example, the USA or the UK (Senate 2001) but to point to a pervasive belief that egalitarianism is an important part of Australian national identity. Yet, in turn, egalitarianism is commonly seen as a characteristic that actually distinguishes Australian from British values and the social hierarchies and elitism associated with British society. Alan Barcan (1984), speaking of the period 1830-1930, argues that because white Australia was created in a harsh and relatively infertile environment, the pioneering spirit relied on mutual community support which led to democratic and egalitarian values being established. Class structures did evolve, but each stratum was bent on survival: a working rather than leisured upper class; rural, industrial or commercial middle classes and a labouring lower class. Education was not required nor scholarship valued when the demand was for ‘pig-feeders and shepherds’ (Barcan 1984, p. 42).

In educational discussions a belief in egalitarianism has taken many forms. In terms of the education of the gifted, it is played out in complex ways, often mobilised by opponents who label gifted education as elitist and therefore anti-egalitarian. Further, high intellectual ability is often equated with unearned privilege, and is counter-posed to a view of educational success which sees such success as gained through hard labour, a meritocratic view which in itself characterises ‘a manly independence and a levelling collectivism’ (Long 1995, p. 2). Such “acceptable” pathways to educational success (from an egalitarian stalwart’s perspective) might also be the result of “hard labour” undertaken by

the previous generation, by whose efforts the improved economic situation of the family affords their children access to a broader range of educational options.

Whilst some might have considered the utilisation of State resources in support of gifted education to be anti-egalitarian, there was no apparent opposition on social equity grounds to the freedom of choice for those with the economic wherewithal to privately fund enhanced educational opportunities for themselves or their children as they saw fit. Secondary education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was considered the domain of the academically inclined with the means to pay; Australian states either introduced a secondary education offering commercial, industrial and domestic subjects in parallel to the purely academic stream or they established, as in Victoria and South Australia, completely segregated schools based on either an academic or a vocational course of study which led to university and the professions or technical colleges, trade, agriculture and industry respectively (Braggett 1985, pp. 15-16). Segregating students according to orientation meant that

[N]o reasonable complaint could be made about social arrangements which depended on the alignment of academic selection and ability, since these social arrangements merely confirmed the fiat of nature. The state's project in providing secondary places was represented as a natural intervention in school selection, while in the same moment it ratified the content and set of dispositions of a culture which had traditionally belonged to one class and for whom it was a 'natural' and spontaneous practice (McCallum 1990, p. 35)

English research in the 1920s suggested that a greater number of children than previously thought would benefit from a full time secondary education based on a broad curriculum in preference to one focused solely on vocational preparation. This research influenced education in NSW, which by 1924 was more progressive than other Australian states when it placed an almost equal emphasis on cultural and skill subjects with English and mathematics (Barcan 1984). Victoria¹⁹ continued to devote two thirds of all teaching time to the

¹⁹ Despite being the richest state in Australia, Victoria was miserly with its education budget. It spent less than any other State save South Australia and had the second highest ratio of pupils per teacher (45:1) yet it managed to better accommodate mentally and physically disabled children than most other States (Barcan 1980).

core subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic. A neo-Herbartian²⁰ syllabus composed of the core subjects of English, mathematics, and moral education; content subjects of history, geography and nature study combined with practical subjects such as manual work for boys and needlework for girls, art, music and physical education, dominated Australian education until 1938 and influenced teaching until the 1950s (Barcan 1980, 1972; Turney 1972). Despite “new education” movements which recognised difference, the principle of uniform practices in Victorian State secondary education germinated in the 1920s. Barcan (1980) surmised that the Department of Education, having adopted an “in principle” practice of avoiding competition with Melbourne’s well established private schools was wary about instituting academic high schools. Yet, despite the education department striving for uniformity, divisions remained between the more academic high schools and technical schools, the latter increasing in number during the Depression Years of the 1930s, perhaps in part to their fee free status.

Comprehensive education and the challenges of a common form of schooling

By the 1950s, education was widely viewed by the community as the principal means for personal, social and economic advancement (Barcan 1984; Marginson 1997) and this supported the increased pervasiveness of comprehensive schools with their ideals of equal opportunity, entitling each child to an ostensibly free educational journey commencing in primary school and culminating with a qualification from either a university or technical college. Potts (2005) observes that equality was an ideal ‘for other people’s children’ in Australian society (p. 6). These ideals of equality continue to have some currency in the present although, as I discuss below, they are somewhat modified by the marketisation of education whereby the middle class is

²⁰ According to Fennell (1910, p. v), ‘[T]he main idea in the Herbartian system of psychology is that the mind is built up of its own contents ... [and] possesses but one single original power: that of entering into relation with externals’. The Herbartian system requires that teachers commence with pupils’ pre-existing knowledge, following a pro forma of “Steps” involving ‘Preparation, Presentation, Assimilation, Application or Association, and Recapitulation’ (Fennell 1910, p. vii) for all lessons. These steps, reinforced by the inspectorial and examination systems, became normalised practices within primary school teaching in Victoria (Turney 1972).

striving to maximise its social advantages at the cost of the poor (see, for example, Potts 2005; Vickers 2004). However, despite these egalitarian principles, the educational system in the post-war period did sort students completing primary school into either academic or technical streams. In secondary school, further examinations were held at the end of second year (Merit Certificate), fourth year (Intermediate Certificate), fifth year (Leaving Certificate) and sixth year (Leaving Certificate Honours) (1939 Victorian qualifications). The system led to academic high schools enjoying a higher status than the vocationally oriented technical schools, an ironic situation considering 'that the egalitarian push to extend secondary education in Australia accentuated the importance of academic high schools and gave status to the children attending them' (Braggett 1985, p. 17). Australian schools continued to group students by age rather than ability, which Braggett (1986, 1985), believes was a direct result of the egalitarian "education for all" movement which privileged the concept of a social age-based grouping in preference to groupings based on attainment. This structure led to a lock-step system of yearly promotion of students throughout primary school, and from the 1950s, transition from primary to secondary schools, until students were finally sorted and categorised by the examination system. Researchers (see, for example, Frydenberg & O'Mullane 2000; Long 1995) have noted that misgivings were expressed by some in the community who felt that comprehensive secondary schooling would result in declining standards, as teachers dealt with students of not only mixed abilities but with diverse, multicultural backgrounds, a direct result of Australia's post-war immigration policy.

Long (1995) also suggests that the rise of comprehensive schools in this period meant there were 'other priorities than CHIP [Children of High Intellectual potential]' (p. 2); although the 1957 Wyndham Report, whilst advocating for comprehensive secondary schools, did express reservations that the gifted minority would be neglected to the ultimate detriment of the community if too much emphasis was placed on addressing the needs of 'the mediocre and dull' (Wyndham Report 1957, n. p. cited in Braggett 1985, p. 18). Yet Barcan (1984) suggests that within schools, 'an attempt was made to cater for all

levels of ability - higher, medium and low - by offering subjects at all levels' (p. 44). Louise Mares (1986) speculates that the failure of comprehensive schools to support the gifted was a passive gesture which ensured that educational excellence was retained by, and associated with, the elite, wealthy section of the community, with the means to provide not only a rich and varied home learning environment but to pay for a private education (see also, Freeman 2001). This notion still holds currency. Of the thirty-two 'Top All Round VCE High Achievers' awarded the 2008 Premier's VCE Award, thirteen (40%) were State Secondary students, including Mac.Robertson Girls' High School (4); Melbourne High School (4) and University High School (1); the remaining 60% came from the private sector (The Age, 2008b, p. 8).

However, the general Australian attitude was that gifted students who came from families unable to afford a private education would ultimately benefit from a comprehensive education and ultimately achieve success. Gifted students did not require special educational provision due to their innate capabilities and to provide a different educational program to other students was generally considered elitist (Frydenberg & O'Mullane 2000).

According to Braggett (1985), Victoria was the most recalcitrant of all Australian states in accepting the comprehensive secondary schooling system, but by 1965, Victoria too, offered a general non-specialist course for the first four years of secondary school. This necessitated an increasing number of remedial classes, as comprehensive schools, premised on the notions of equal of opportunity and a common curriculum for all students, attended to those who previously might not have aspired to an on-going education. Barcan (1984), observes that where once entry to secondary schools was based on attainment, students were now admitted irrespective of ability, although technical schools continued to be viewed as the preserve of the academically disinclined. However, now, schools were expected to cater for a wide range of interests and abilities. This was consistent with the view of an equality of opportunity for all via educational provision, but it also reinforced the challenge facing teachers who now had to cater for differences within a common form of schooling that emphasised sameness over differentiation.

In his research of the period 1955-1975, Braggett (1993, 1985) found little evidence of gifted students receiving any specific formal attention in comprehensive high schools. Long (1995), states that what little was done came in the form of in-class attention to individual differences; special classes with curriculum adaptation or streaming dependent upon ability or performance. Unfortunately, in the late 1950s to the early 1960s, it seems that the quality and supply of teachers²¹ did not meet the heavy demands of rising enrolments alongside increasing retention rates in comprehensive secondary schools (Barcan 1984; Braggett 1986). But as widespread testing had the effect of removing the less academically inclined, the poorly motivated and the non-performers,²² some classes were composed of students of higher than average ability so, that '[E]ven teachers with limited teaching skill were able to pitch their lessons at a higher content level and hope that the ability of the students would counteract poor instructional techniques' (Braggett 1985 p. 20), despite a lack of physical resources and support materials.

By the end of the 1960s Victoria had raised the minimum leaving age to 15, the Intermediate Certificate had been abolished²³ and differing school-based approaches to curricula and teaching were adopted with the trend for an "open education". Victoria, one of the most reticent of states to join the comprehensive school movement became one of the most radical. Barcan (1980) offers three reasons for this: increased pressure to cope with the boosted number of students with diverse abilities and varying motivation to remain at school; the militancy of secondary school teachers and the timely appeal of

²¹ Such a deficit was perhaps in part due to gendered practices of education departments. Legislation in 1889 prevented married women from teaching until the Teaching Service (Married Women) Act of 1956; many single women were denied tenure so led itinerant professional lives and married women were often placed in unfilled temporary positions, particularly during World War II (Dwyer 2006; Silver 2008; Theobald 2000). According to Marjorie Theobald (2000), such practices led to 'administratively created certainties [which] shaped the lives and subjectivities of male and female teachers until the 1960s' (p. 147).

²² I recall that during my own secondary education in a well regarded comprehensive high school in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, we were grouped until the end of fourth form according to our test results. Thus, the most academically inclined (or at least test proficient) were in the "A" forms, with the rest allocated to forms B-F, according to their test results.

²³ The Victorian Universities Schools Examination Board (VUSEB) abolished the Intermediate Certificate in 1967, the Leaving Certificate in 1972 and renamed the Matriculation Certificate to the Victorian Higher School Certificate (HSC) in 1970 (Manzer, 2003).

neo-progressive ideas evolving within the Western world's 1967-1974 cultural upheaval which symbolically rejected both authority and tradition (Barcan 1984, 1980).

Regarding them as elitist and divisive of society, teachers' unions and professional associations expressed their disdain for senior high or selective entry schools such as Melbourne Boys High, MacRobertson Girls High and the co-educational University High (which continued to offer a humanist-realist curriculum) (Barcan 1980; Gross 2004; Potts 2005). The Australian Education Union continues to be opposed to ability grouping and accelerated learning, suggesting that the best outcomes for all students are within comprehensive classroom structures (see Australian Education Union 1993; Senate 2001, pp. 60, 64). Yet the common public perception was that these were the best State schools for academically able students whose parents did not have the means to attend a private school. With an emphasis on formal curriculum and teaching methods, the aforementioned schools were now seen by the education unions and associated professional associations as being in conflict with the new values and morals embraced by a multi-faceted, pluralistic society. As Potts (2005) writes, industrial action by teacher unions from the late 1960s to the 1980s, purportedly more concerned with work conditions and class struggle than matters academic, did not endear state schools 'to those in search of an academic curriculum leading to university and high status courses' (p. 6). Also, I suggest that allowing underqualified people to practice as teachers in an attempt to address the secondary teacher deficit did nothing to enhance teaching as a profession and of itself warranted attention (see Barcan 1980; Sibley 2007). Concurrently in this period, an increasing focus was being paid to the plight of the educational inequities in society and how these might be addressed. These inequities included the integration of the handicapped and disabled into mainstream schools; the education of girls; ethnic groups and the plight of native Aboriginal children. Educational bureaucracy responded by placing the burden of implementation and responsibility on schools and teachers.

The policy quest for equality

The process of lobbying for a greater recognition of differences within the student population was accompanied by a concerted policy and political emphasis on “equality of opportunity” and an apparent shift in the cultural and political mood in Australia as suggested by the election of the Labor Party to federal power in December 1972. This government is widely recognised for its significant investment in, and policy attention to, education. On winning office, it commissioned research into commonwealth education funding and the report of this inquiry has had a major impact on the organisation and funding of Australian schooling. The aim of the Interim Committee for the Schools Commission²⁴ which resulted in the 1973 Karmel Report, was to standardise and regulate commonwealth education funding to end bickering between the states, to support all schools purely on the basis of economic need, and for all schools to attain common resource standards with supplementary grants for disadvantaged schools (Marginson 1993). Of the new Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, Madeleine Mattarozzi Laming (2001 p. 250) writes that ‘[T]he promotion of equality dominated Whitlam’s political philosophy and informed his pronouncements’. Whitlam’s (1972) policy speech made prior to his election is peppered with the use of ‘equality’, ‘opportunities’, ‘promoting equality’, ‘overcoming social, economic and language inequalities’ and ‘equality of opportunity’. According to Mattarozzi Laming (2001), Whitlam, with his belief in social democracy, was convinced of the necessity for government intervention and management in the economy, society and education to alleviate the disadvantage and inequality of the less fortunate, but of these, education was the most crucial focus of the Whitlam social vision. Marginson (1997), claims that when Whitlam spoke of a universal education as being both the key to equal opportunity as well as an instrument to promote equality, he was expressing a desire for a ‘system of social selection in which merit would be distributed on the basis of individual merit rather than social origin ... [which would] provide all people with an equal prospect of social power’ (p. 17). In such a climate, where “individual merit” was prized, it is

²⁴ The Commonwealth Schools Commission (CSC) was established by the Commonwealth Schools Commission Act in 1973 (Senate 1988). It closed in 1988 and was replaced by the Australian Education Council (AEC) (Wilson 1996).

possible to imagine a policy and educational initiatives targeted towards gifted students. Yet this was not the case. This could possibly be accounted for in part, as I have suggested above, by the association of those possessing high ability not necessarily needing to work hard, and therefore perhaps not deserving of recognition. It is also likely that as policy attention was directed to those social groups who were most visibly disadvantaged with a long and documented history of social impediments, highly able children would not be included in this particular social vision, even though one could argue that their educational needs were not being met.

Although the Whitlam Labor Government (1972-1975) might have been more generous than its successors in terms of educational vision and social reform, Marginson (1997, p. 9), claims that ‘its central rubric of ‘equality’ was more ambiguous than it seemed’ perhaps exemplified by the increasing governance and intervention required by the Commonwealth to support the rapidly growing education sector. The number of staff administering the new policy discourses virtually quadrupled between 1968 and 1975 (Jackson 1985 cited in Marginson 1997, p. 32) and educational attainment regulated the merit-based selection and promotion of these public sector positions. Marginson (1997) argues that a “chicken and egg” situation evolved as the increased demand for educational equal opportunity was in part created by the government programs themselves. These resulted in an increased demand for teachers, and therefore an expansion of the tertiary sector, which in turn created the need for an expanded administrative bureaucracy. Thus, educational growth was not merely the result of demographic or economic demands but was in part, one created by the government; a demand that once taken up, became increasingly ‘difficult to regulate and limit’ (Marginson 1997, p. 33).

Despite its evident shortcomings, as noted, historically, Australian education was premised upon the democratic notion of “equality of opportunity” but achieving “equality” or “equal outcomes” is a considerably different and challenging social and political objective. This, as Barcan (1980, p. 388), observes, is educationally optimistic and I suggest, perhaps idealistic and even injudicious. The distinction needs to be clearly made of the vast difference

between “equality of opportunity” and “equal outcomes”. Equality of opportunity is not (of itself) incompatible with the promotion and development of education for the gifted. It could, for example, be monitored so that all students are guaranteed the same level of inputs such as funding and resources. Equal outcomes, however, is a ridiculous notion. It implies that those with the capacity and capability could (or should) be denied resources. A subtext of the “equality of outcomes” notion is that the gifted students’ “fair share” of resources must be redirected to the less capable which therefore contradicts the notion of equality of opportunity.

Lingard, Hayes and Mills (1999) suggest that the Interim Committee for the Schools Commission (1973) recognised that to implement their policy recommendations, a form of social democratic devolution to schools was required. In theory, greater autonomy at the school level would utilise the professional judgements of principals and teachers in conjunction with the parents of their students, senior students and the local community. Thus, those intimately involved in schooling were considered the best placed and informed of local requirements in order ‘to provide a more equal opportunity for all children to participate more fully in the society as valued and respected members of it’ (Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission 1973, p. 23 cited in Barcan 1980, p. 389).

Rather ironically, this “bottom-up” approach to devolution was to be managed and partly funded by a central federal bureaucracy, whilst the state systems maintained their constitutional and fiscal responsibilities for government schooling (Lingard, Hayes & Mills 1999). According to Barcan (1984), whilst the Karmel Report placed an emphasis on decentralisation, equality and diversity, it was aware of the potential difficulties and the sacrifices required to implement a policy of “equal outcomes” stating that ‘[M]ore equal outcomes from schooling require unequal treatment of children’ (Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission 1973, p. 22 cited in Haynes 1997, p. 34). I suggest that to achieve “equal outcomes” in the classroom, there first must be a resolution of the inherent tensions between the terms “equality” or ‘the condition of being equal: sameness: evenness’ (Chambers 1972, p. 442) with

“diversity” or ‘state of being diverse: difference: unlikeness: variety’ (Chambers 1972, p. 379).

Thus, the conflict between “equal opportunity” (a good thing) and “equal outcomes” (a bad thing for gifted students) created tensions in schools and, as schools would be held accountable if the various disadvantaged groups did not attain equal outcomes, it is not surprising that schools began ‘by retarding the most academically able’ (Barcan 1984, p. 47). Consequently, whilst the Karmel Report and the Labor Government’s reform initiatives served to alter the dismal educational opportunities for long-neglected sections of the community and did not completely reject the notion of academic excellence, its “in need” principles (Barcan 1980; 1984) had a significant impact upon the education of gifted and talented children. An underlying assumption was that the children who fell within this category would cope, no matter what educational system prevailed because of the very nature of their abilities. Yet proponents of gifted education would argue that such an outlook produced an additional disadvantaged group (see, for example, Gross 2004; Senate 2001, 1988), albeit one that was different from the traditionally defined disadvantaged groups such as the disabled or those from low socio-economic groups (Haynes 1997; Long 1995).

By the mid 1970s, concerns about the quality of education and, in particular, poor literacy levels were being raised, evident in the 1975 House of Representatives Select Committee on Specific Learning Difficulties (Barcan 1984) and for some, the gifted were included in these concerns. With reference to this period, Braggett (1985, p. 22), raises the question: ‘[H]ad a perfectly legitimate desire to extend educational facilities to all adolescents and to mitigate, even remove, the debilitating effects of social inequality resulted in a situation that eventually disadvantaged more-able children in Australian schools?’ One would have to respond with a resounding “yes” because of the failure to understand and define just what was meant by “equal outcomes”. This sentiment is echoed by Start, John and Strange (1975 cited in Long 1995) who also suggested that the term ‘exceptional’ was being used negatively, in the sense of being handicapped rather than as denoting excellence.

During this same decade, there were moves afoot internationally to give a higher profile to the issue of the education of the gifted and in September 1975, the first International Conference for Gifted and Talented Children was held in London. At the closing session, many participants became the founding members of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, which became a global organisation for the advocacy of gifted children (Froese Klassen & Greene 2007).

Developments and programs in Victoria, 1970s-1980s

Despite its evident ambivalence towards the educational needs of gifted children, the Victorian Education Department was officially represented at this inaugural world conference. A strong personal interest in gifted children, plus intensive lobbying of Education Department personnel, enabled H. P. Waller, a secondary school inspector, to attend. Upon returning, she became an advocate for gifted education in Victoria, recommending curriculum support from international experts; organising seminars and exchange visits for teachers; establishing enrichment classes for secondary students and suggesting that a gifted association be formed in Victoria (Braggett 1985).²⁵ Despite the lack of official policies and program guidelines for the teaching of gifted and talented students, the then Director-General of Education (1973-1982), Lawrie Shears was sympathetic to the cause of gifted education, perhaps predisposed by his own education at University High School (UHS) and gave carte-blanche to both the Secondary Schools Division and Special Services to pursue the issue. Thus, in January 1977, an officially sanctioned policy that had little “bite” for the education of gifted students eventuated in the creation of the Gifted Children Task Force Secondary Schools Division (GCTFSS) (Senate 1988). The GCTFSS adopted the Marland (1972) definition for gifted children but included “potential”. The term “talented” described students with an outstanding ability or potential in a particular area that is, in a single domain

²⁵ Barcan (1984), writes that associations for the gifted and talented in Australia were formed by parents for predominantly political purposes acting as advocates for their children. When co-ordinator of the Boroondara Gifted Network in 2000, I met resistance from State school principals who were opposed to the inclusion of parents, despite the directive that “[L]ocal gifted networks are open to teachers and parents of gifted children from government, Catholic and independent schools (DEET 2000, p. 1). This illustrates the combined resistance of some principals to not only gifted education but (surprisingly) to the practice of community liaison.

compared to the gifted who demonstrate outstanding capabilities or potential in a number of areas. The terms gifted and talented were not mutually exclusive for the GCTFSS (Senate 1988, p. 187). Its work led to ‘the trailblazing innovations of cluster groups, mentor programs, the acceleration programs at University High School, and the publication of important writings on the education of the gifted ... despite the efforts of one Victorian political party which sought to curtail their efforts’ (Braggett, 1996a, p. 13). Its aim was to investigate both curriculum and provision for intellectually able students in secondary schools (Senate 1988). There was no equivalent investigation at the primary school level (Braggett 1985) but this period also saw the nascence of grassroots parental advocacy, which evolved into the more formal gifted associations (Braggett 1996a).²⁶

Devolutionary educational policies meant that individual primary schools chose whether or not to expend energy on gifted education despite the absence of a formal gifted policy in Victoria (Schools Commission 1980), but enough momentum was created by a small number of interested schools and their local initiatives to create a Gifted Children Committee to advise the Primary Division. A Project Team was formed in 1981, but was given a clear directive to develop programs to function within the mainstream which contrasted to the “gathering of like minds” approach of the Secondary Task Force. Despite establishing the Task Force and the Gifted Children Committee, which drafted a gifted education policy, it was not formally adopted by the education department. Rather, all students were to attain ‘their highest level of intellectual, emotional and social competence’ (Ministerial Statement 1979, n. p. cited in Braggett 1985, p. 52). According to Braggett (1985), this was a placatory measure directed towards those who believed that a formal gifted policy would restrict the (ostensibly) flexible educational practices in Victorian schools.

²⁶ The Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC) was created in 1978 and the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT) in 1985.

Cluster groups

In an Australian first, cluster groups were implemented as a result of the attention given to the needs of gifted students. Cluster groups were formed to complement school based programs²⁷ whereby a host school would provide a unit of work, for a half day per week over a set period of time – usually about six weeks (Senate 1988). Work was pitched from middle secondary to post secondary levels (GCTFSSD 1981). Two students from participating schools were selected to attend. Although cluster groups and programs were valued by the students whose interests, abilities and skills were being recognised, not all schools participated with equal degrees of fervour. Enthusiasm was tempered by the issues associated with student identification and/or selection or by teachers apathetic or even hostile to the cluster group initiative, and who, signalling their displeasure, made no workload allowances for participating students. Furthermore, the additional efforts required by already over-burdened teachers conducting and/or organising the cluster groups without official departmental support - particularly when the Gifted Children Committee and the Task Force numbers were reduced - meant that after the initial burst of enthusiasm, by 1984 the cluster group initiative had all but fizzled out (Braggett 1985).

The Task Force was aware that although the implementation of cluster groups was a welcome initiative, such groups did not adequately provide for the educational needs of more academically precocious students and so the Task Force sought assistance from tertiary institutions. From 1980-c1983, Victoria College (Rusden Campus) provided term-long programs beyond the normal school syllabus for students in Years 6-9, but this provision was ‘strictly an enrichment programme’ (Henry 1984, p. 228). Although students, their parents and the lecturers of Rusden praised the program and lauded its benefits in their program evaluations, staff cut-backs and increased work loads prevented its continuation (Henry 1984). Similarly, from 1979, Deakin University (Geelong) conducted a 25 week program for Year 9 students, which was extended to 30

²⁷ Cluster groups began in Geelong in April 1979. By the end of 1981, figures provided by Braggett (1985) show that 20 cluster groups were in existence, comprised of ‘120 high schools, 36 technical schools, 26 primary schools and 27 independent schools and colleges’ (p. 54).

weeks in 1985 (Hudson & Moulton 1986). Entry was based on a rigorous evaluation process which included testing and interviews; the courses covered various disciplines in the sciences, mathematics, management, computing, arts and design, humanities and creative writing (Hudson & Tomkins 1984).

The program aimed to provide extension and enrichment courses; to encourage schools to examine their own provisions for gifted students and to inform school communities about the educational needs of talented students and how to address those needs (Hudson & Tomkins 1984). Deakin University, using volunteer lecturers, developed and extended the program incorporating a Year 10 extension program, research projects for Year 9 students, cluster programs for primary schools plus a pilot program in a local Geelong primary which trialled Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli 1977; Renzulli & Reis 1986). Staffing cutbacks and an increased workload also encroached upon the available time of the volunteer lecturers involved in the program and it ceased in c1986.²⁸

The forerunner of the current Select Entry Acceleration Learning program (SEAL) (DEECD 2007b; Plunkett & Kronborg 2007) began in 1979 when nine secondary teachers were seconded to Burwood State College to devise a curriculum model designed to compress the normal six years of Victorian secondary schooling into four. Students from government comprehensive schools eligible for the acceleration program required traits covering 'high general intellectual ability, academic attitude, high motivation, and social and emotional adjustment' (Braggett 1985, p. 58). Student selection using various instruments including IQ tests in conjunction with parent and teacher nomination began in 1980 and the program commenced in 1981 (Schools Commission 1980). It was decided that an evaluation of the University High School (UHS) Acceleration Program and assessing its viability within the

²⁸ I failed to find an exact date for the demise of this initiative despite contacting several senior Deakin University academics who were employed during the period and who might have been involved in the program. The Deakin University Library was unable to unearth any archival material related to this program.

system would occur ‘after the fourth group has completed its course’ (GCTFSSD 1981, p. 44).²⁹

Braggett (1985) writes that from 1980, the Task Force adopted a more comprehensive approach to practice based upon Renzulli’s (1977) enrichment model which broadened both the themes of study and the student selection base for cluster groups to twenty percent rather than drawing on the top three or four percent of purely academic achievers. This modification was not only more in line with the “work within the mainstream” directive given to the Primary Project team, but also in accordance with the tenets of the State Labor party which came to power in 1982 and emphasised educational integration. Eventually, it was this approach that prevailed for, by becoming more inclusive, the original premise that created the Task Force became diluted. However, despite such manoeuvrings, the acceleration project at University High School (UHS) continued, albeit in a rather clandestine fashion as the Gifted Children’s Task Force was advised by the Director-General of Education not to openly advertise the UHS acceleration project (Braggett 1985). Gross (2004, 1999a) observes that the Victorian teachers’ unions were vociferous in their opposition to any form of alternative programming for gifted students, no matter the guise. The unions were guided in no small measure by Joan Kirner, then Minister for Education (1988-1990) and later the first female Premier of Victoria (1990-1992) who, by taking a defensive position, argued that ultimately, gifted programs were a device utilised by the ruling class to maintain both educational and political hegemony. The corollary of both educational and political machinations meant that the gifted education movement went, in a sense, underground, and was not prominent on policy agendas. Nevertheless, despite these setbacks for the gifted education movement, some schools and teachers maintained a professional interest in the area and remained committed to the project.

²⁹ The Victorian Education department conducted a longitudinal study of the UHS acceleration program (Senate 1988). In her positive evaluation, Murphy (n. d.) observed that not only does the program continue to survive, but has done so through changes of government.

Uncertain times: mixed messages

Primary schools responded with particular enthusiasm to the in-service education professional development (PD) on gifted education provided in the 1980s by the Task Force (Braggett 1985, p. 60; Ministry of Education 1987). This PD was designed to assist teachers and schools with curriculum and program development, classroom strategies (such as the use of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives) and school organisation (see Dalton, McGaughey & Smith 1984). Growing demand from schools seeking gifted PD resulted from the increased devolutionary emphasis assigning responsibility to primary schools for the entire spectrum of learning and ability, including the educational needs of the gifted. A small number of primary schools provided an exemplary differentiated curriculum for highly-able students in the classroom, and according to Braggett (1985), these successes were as a result of a 'total school commitment' (p. 640) with both the principal and assistant principal actively involved teaching small groups of gifted children.³⁰

By 1985, schools had virtually to manage alone as educational department support for gifted education PD was discontinued, cluster groups went into recess and at a central level, staffing to the Gifted Task Force was reduced (Braggett 1985). The Gifted Children Committee had been disbanded at the end of 1984 '[D]espite achieving tangible results' (Senate 1988, p. 14). Nevertheless, associated research and curriculum development continued (see Dalton & Smith 1986), albeit by carefully camouflaging all references to the gifted and talented with the blanket term of "special abilities".

Although impressed by the efforts of those committed to gifted education, in 1988 the Senate Select Committee concluded that '[M]ost Australian schools do not appear to make any provision for the education of gifted children ...[which] is not an acceptable option' (Senate 1988, pp. 82-83). Despite this conclusion, the Federal Government rejected the Committee's recommendations the following year, evident in the lack of funding to

³⁰ The creed of one such commended school is 'Striving for excellence in education within a stimulating learning environment and supportive school community'
<<http://www.templestowehts.vic.edu.au/>>

specifically support gifted education. Tellingly, at the same time, [AUD] 230 million was allocated from the federal budget to support and encourage sporting excellence (Long 1995).

Educational reform in Victoria, 1990s – Schools of the Future

From the mid 1980s onward, the social-democratic legacy of the Karmel Report was waning in favour of right wing economic rationalism accompanied by a trend for greater public accountability in education (Kenway 1990). Seddon (2004) observes that Victoria, under the auspices of a reformist Kennett Liberal Government after a decade of Labor, ‘experienced a particularly vigorous form of economic fundamentalism between 1992 and 1999’ (p. 1). This era of New Right ideology, not unique to Victoria (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 the business and advertising worlds. During the 1980s, curriculum, its assessment, standards, teachers, educational policymakers, teachers’ unions and funding to State schools had increasingly been critiqued (Kenway 1995) and now change brought a redistribution of power. The authority of ‘key allies’ (Pascoe & Pascoe 1998 p. x), that is, school principals, along with the sway of parents as consumers, was boosted compared to that of the dwindling influence of teachers who, as body, became secondary to the systemic educational and curriculum reform.

Central to the Victorian Government’s sweeping educational reforms of the 1990s was the introduction of the *Schools of the Future* (SoF) initiative which saw the devolution of responsibility passed over from a centralised location to individual schools for: fiscal and personnel management; the development school charters (contracts with the State aligning school goals with state resources); computerised administrative systems and assessment of school performance within a framework of centralised accountability and standards (Chadbourne & Ingvarson 1998; Pascoe & Pascoe, 1998; Victorian Auditor-General’s Office 1995). The underlying assumption for SoF is, according to Chadbourne and Ingvarson (1998), ‘that there are causal links between changes in school management and changes in teaching practice’ (p. 62). The

momentum of the *Schools of the Future* had great relevance for gifted education. The changes in curriculum and policy also emphasised the discrepancy between sameness, that is, an outcomes-based curriculum premised on equality of opportunity inherent within the *Curriculum Standards Framework* and of difference, as seen by the *Bright Futures* gifted education policy and its accompanying professional development program, aspects which I discuss later in this chapter.

The *Schools of the Future* and its subsidiary policies and programs can be interpreted through the lens of what Foucault calls an ‘architecture that would operate to transform individuals to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct’ (Foucault 1977b, p. 172). Schools, although self-managing remain under the gaze of the State, which far from relinquishing power continues to maintain a disciplinary regime by maintaining accountability through curriculum normalisation and surveillance by testing, all enforced by a supposedly streamlined educational bureaucracy via its principal class.³¹ *Schools of the Future* therefore, is representative of Australia’s fading egalitarianism; SoF is a mechanism maintaining the concentration of economic and political power within a hierarchy of privilege over those of lesser status, including schools situated in struggling socio-economic locales. Self-managing schools function to create a ‘competitive corporatism that has long been the norm for private schools’ (Gough 1997, p. 11). Private schools were more than ready to turn combatant, rallying against any threat of government funding withdrawal which might destabilise their position as the arbiters of excellence, as compared to the State administered education system which was seen by the New Right as chaotic, disordered, demoralised and anti-intellectual (Kenway 1990). One of the justifications for introducing school reform was in reaction to the 1980s panic that State schools were producing unemployable youth. *Schools of the Future* would, it was claimed, improve the academic and social

³¹ Principals were provided with training and a support manual to assist in the process of State deregulation and the devolution of educational responsibility to a local level. *Creating a School of the Future* (DSE 1994) includes units on self and staff management as well as teacher assessment through an annual performance review, the Professional Recognition Program (PRP), a process that became compulsory when it was incorporated into the Teachers (Victorian Government Schools) Conditions of Employment Award (Chadbourne & Ingvarson 1998).

outcomes for all state educated students, including the disadvantaged and disaffected and in turn, benefit the nation (see, for example, Kenway1990; Lingard, Hayes & Mills 1999). *Schools of the Future* was associated with economic rationalism and the stream-lining of school performance. It was an era, which by 1995, saw the closure or merger of nearly 300 schools, a reduction of more than 8000 teachers (Chadbourne & Ingvarson 1998; Hurley 1995; VicHansard 2006) plus ancillary staff, and the contracting-out of services such as school cleaning to both reduce expenditure and generate savings (Victorian Auditor-General's Office 1995).

National curriculum framework

In 1988, with support from the business community, the Federal Minister for Education, John Dawkins sought to establish curriculum consistency between all Australian State and Territory education systems, and founded the Australian Education Council (AEC), comprised of Commonwealth and State Ministers of Education who agreed on ten national goals of schooling. Announced in April 1989 in what became known as the "Hobart Declaration on Schooling" (see McGaw 1994; Reid 2005), these goals were attempts to establish consistency between states and to identify generic competencies but maintain enough flexibility to embrace differing educational pathways. A common curriculum language was intended to smooth transfer between state systems but also to assist teachers improve educational outcomes for all students by increasing retention rates - including those in disadvantaged groups. This would be accomplished through equity programs, improvements in teaching, learning, assessment and reporting plus the facilitation of vocational pathways. Reid (2005), writes that '[P]redictably, the various State Directors General of Education sought to preserve their control over curriculum policy' (p. 18) and after commissioning a mapping exercise to confirm that curriculum similarities did not warrant further national development, 'agreed that these curriculum maps would form the basis of national statements although they insisted that no State or Territory would be obliged to adopt them' (p. 18). In 1993, State political machinations impeded the momentum to establish a national curriculum and the National Statements and Profiles twice failed to receive endorsement after which the States and

Territories were permitted to utilise the document at will (Reid 2005). The issue has not been laid to rest for, as part of its platform to gain Federal office in 2007, the then Leader of the Opposition pledged to strike an agreement ‘between Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers as well as Catholic and Independent schools to a National Curriculum in the identified priority areas of maths, the sciences, english [sic] and history’ (Rudd & Smith 2007, p. 3). The debates surrounding a common Australian curriculum continue at the time of writing (The Age 2008a; The Australian 2008; Gillard 2008; National Curriculum Board 2008).

Curriculum Standards Framework: Victoria

The Victorian Board of Studies (BoS) was charged with developing a common, State wide framework of curriculum practices and standards for Prep-Year 10 and adapted the now abandoned nationally developed curriculum and assessment frameworks. As part of the massive overhaul of the education system and provision, in 1995, Victoria adopted a new series of guidelines for curriculum across P-10: the *Curriculum Standards Framework* (CSF), which was an outcomes-based model of curriculum. Simultaneously, common testing for all year three and five students was introduced in State Government schools. 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 established within the CSF (Pascoe & Pascoe 1998; Yates & Leder 1996). By making the CSF standards publicly available, the professional concerns of teaching moved beyond the endeavours of individual schools and into the homes of families and the domain of public debate. The so called “objective” results of the LAP not only provided direct feedback to parents, thereby bypassing the judgements of individual teachers and schools, but they also became a means of comparing school performance. Therefore the LAP process ‘became another instrument of accountability when added to school charters’ (Pascoe & Pascoe 1998, p. 7). The students, whose parents now had a greater voice in their education, had to demonstrate an improved academic performance ‘for the sake of the school if not for themselves’ (Arnot et al. 1999 p. 155). Thus, teachers and schools 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, p. 7) believe was ‘*done to*, rather than *with teachers*’ (emphasis in original) which appeared to reinforce their increasingly invisible status. Accountability is of course important, but linked with the top-down, politically motivated imposition of assessment standards, the teaching community, reeling from not only the recent restructuring that saw school closures and the associated culling of teachers, now had to deal with the curriculum change which exacerbated feelings of stress, bewilderment and for many, low professional self-esteem. In the next section I briefly expound upon outcomes-based education before discussing how it is strangely coupled with the *Bright Futures* gifted education policy within the *Schools of the Future* initiative.

Outcomes-based education: tensions and contradictions for schools and teachers

Outcomes-based education (OBE) became the dominant model for curriculum programs in Victoria, and to a significant extent, Australian schooling during the 1990s. In sum, OBE is characterised by a focus documenting the *outcomes* of learning rather than the *process* of learning. Despite attempts by the (NSW) education department to defend outcomes-based education curriculum design as a means for differentiating learning for gifted students (McGrath 1994), the move to OBE was not met without wide-ranging criticism. Critics of OBE (see, for example Berlach 2004; Donnelly 2007), claim that its ideology is couched in mechanistic, rationalistic terms reflected by business driven jargon, its obsession with the performance and accountability of teachers, standards, and the endless pursuit of evidence gathering as proof of achieving learning outcomes. Within an outcomes-based model, there is no prescribed syllabus, but rather curriculum guidelines and frameworks which specify particular learning goals or outcomes to be achieved and for which teaching programs must be designed and planned. The teacher becomes constructed, and somewhat marginalised, as a facilitator of learning for the “stakeholders” rather than as someone who conveys knowledge. As OBE focuses on gaining an outcome, it pays scant regard for the “in-put” or the content required to

achieve the “out-put”. Similarly, Berlach (2004) observes, there are no foundations for differentiation within an OBE approach, neither of excellence nor failure; and this is of particular relevance to the status of gifted education within an OBE model. With an over-riding concern on outcomes, “standards” or the quality of learning are of no or limited consequence once a learning outcome has been achieved – and if an outcome has not been achieved, then it is a case of “keep trying”. One risk of this approach as Berlach notes, (2004 n. p.), is that it might ‘lead to mediocrity and complacency on part of the students’ (and teachers) with a focus on aiming for the bare minimum to satisfy learning requirements.

By mandating an OBE based State-wide curriculum framework and introducing the LAP, a high degree of curriculum surveillance resulted, openly reinforced by the name change in 2001 to Achievement Improvement *Monitor* (AIM)³² (my emphasis), which I argue, led in turn to a high degree of curriculum conformity.

OBE represents a uniform curriculum approach that attempts to, but often does not succeed, in responding to diversity. Thus, OBE appears to be the perfect basis upon which to construct an educational system for a society that prides itself as egalitarian, bent on providing not only equal educational opportunities but equality of educational outcomes. This is one of the powerful myths of outcomes-based education, but as I discuss below, the implementation of such an approach poses significant dilemmas and limitations in relation to the education of gifted children.

Outcomes-based education and the *Bright Futures* policy and programs

In May 1995, the same year that the CSF/OBE approach was introduced, at the first Australasian International Conference on the Education of Gifted Students held in Melbourne, the then Minister for Education in Victoria, Phil Gude, publicly launched the Government’s Bright Futures policy statement on the

³² 2008 marks the commencement of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 which replaces the AIM. The test, in three sections, covers Language Conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation), Reading and Numeracy (DEECD 2008a).

education of gifted students in State Government schools. This was the first and, to date, the only time (1995-1999), that Victoria³³ had an official policy for 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.). In an 'Information for parents' pamphlet (DSE 1995c, n. p.) the word "all" is capitalised, simultaneously reinforcing the notion of inclusivity and difference.

However, it could also be argued whether the *Bright Futures* actually achieved the status of an actual "policy". I believe that the *Bright Futures* policy is a broad, general, and rather confused philosophical statement endeavouring to illuminate the conflicting tensions inherent in the gifted education domain. It is not a formal policy. To qualify as a policy, a document needs to be a mandated set of instructions, which as well as being published and distributed to all, is accompanied at the time of release, with appropriate mechanisms and resources to measure its implementation and enforce its compliance. A policy goes beyond mere guidelines and clearly stipulates what specific course[s] of action will be adopted to implement a particular philosophy. The *Bright Futures* was not a policy, but a set of "guidelines" as suggested by modification of the title in the Department of Education's 1999 publication: *Bright Futures: A Guide for Strategic Action to Support Gifted Students 2000-2005* (my emphasis). The actual wording of the 1995 policy statement, with its stress on 'all students' (DSE 1995a, n. p.) not only reflects the tenacity of Australian egalitarianism, but is also an example of a political change which legitimised the efforts of those committed to the cause of gifted education. Advocates for gifted education had previously confronted opposition from the combined forces of the former Labor Government and powerful, antagonistic unions which under the mantra of social justice, strove for equal opportunity and equal outcomes, but in so doing impeded the right of a group of students to

³³ Victoria was the last Australian State or Territory to make a formal policy commitment to gifted education (Plunkett et al. 2003).

an education appropriate to their needs (see Gross 1994; Long 1995). Although the gifted education lobby was in part successful by gaining a gifted policy, it was a victory of the innocent. According to Foucault (Foucault 1977a), change can benefit some social groups who then work within the newly dominant system. For the gifted education lobby, change in the form of policy recognition was an artefact that recognised the rights of gifted students to an education commensurate with their cognitive abilities, but change, embedded within the discourse of gifted education, masked the discursive practices of economic rationalism by a government beholden to the high stakes investment of big business. Education, the *Schools of the Future* and particularly the education of the gifted and talented thus became a capital investment, “value adding” to not only the individual being educated - who, as an economic commodity, is continually assessed and measured during the process - but eventually to society in general (Marginson 1999). Thus, it could be argued that the government, utilising social and political techniques strategically aligned itself with the gifted education movement and the constructed “truths” regarding giftedness and educational excellence, but at the same time, acknowledged and controlled these truths for its own purposes.

The DSE described the *Bright Futures* policy as ‘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 Government is not reticent in declaring that its gifted policy is contained within the *Schools of the Future* philosophy, a philosophy advocating (as previously discussed) ‘[T]he market view of school-based management’ (Lingard, Hayes & Mills 1999, p. 5) 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. But herein lies a conundrum; that is, where is the “market push” for gifted education support? If one accepts the IQ distribution as a means of classifying populations to determine how many might be gifted (see Table 2.1), then it is not likely to be a significant issue in terms of the numbers of parents seeking gifted education

programs for their children. The real stimulus for the *Bright Futures* policy by the Liberal Government might well have been more about their own political marketing efforts ‘to significantly enhance students’ opportunities’ (DSE 1995b, p. 2) and thus make a claim that something is being done for gifted students rather than any real response to market demand.

All the same, Lingard et al. (1999) claim that distance and tensions emerged between teachers and their principals, who were now obliged to work primarily as marketing-managers rather than professional educators. In primary schools, 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. Additionally, the results of their work would be partially assessed by the LAP, intended to ‘provide important information about the achievement of gifted primary students’ (DSE 1995b, p. 2). This was, then, a time of significant policy changes that had a far-reaching impact on the nature of teachers’ work. It was also a time of growing expectations for the range of duties and responsibilities teachers should undertake. Responding and catering to the needs of gifted children was one of these additional responsibilities, overlain on an already heavy set of professional expectations.

The *Bright Futures* gifted policy was to be implemented through the *Curriculum Standards Framework* which, in theory, ‘allows students to progress vertically at their optimum individual pace, irrespective of age or year levels (DSE 1995b, p. 2). However, as previously discussed in this chapter, with the exceptions of a few schools such as the University High School program, Victorian State schools were organised heterogeneously with a lock-step structure of promotion by age rather than by ability and teachers had typically and predominantly taught to the “average student” within these groupings. This was the case, even though the DSE recognised 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.

In sum, during the 1990s, and within the *Bright Futures* policy and the *Curriculum Standards Framework*, the mainstream approach of age based groupings was to be retained 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 was to provide examples of suitable learning “activities” (DSE 1995b, p. 2). I emphasise the word “activities” to draw attention to a debate within the field of practice and research on gifted education. Many proponents of gifted education are adamant that providing “activities” and even “programs” such as Future Problem Solving, Tournament of Minds and the Maths Olympiad, whilst most useful, are forms of extension and enrichment and do not equate with a curriculum suitable for gifted students which is embedded in policy with specific aims and objectives (see, for example, Senate 2001 3.46-3.67; Wilson 1996).

It is somewhat paradoxical, that neo-liberal enactments bent on addressing declining standards and promoting excellence – albeit as an investment for the future - did not provide a specific curriculum for gifted students within a gifted policy, rather leaving it to the now marginalised classroom teachers to address the issue with “serving suggestions” within the CSF. By its own admission, the Victorian education department stated that provision for gifted students did not occur in a concerted manner despite the guidelines. In its new iteration as the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) and under the auspices of a new Labor Government, the Victorian education department commented to the Senate review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children

that much of the extension that is provided appears to be ad hoc, non-sequential and disconnected from the normal classroom curriculum. Gifted programs should be well planned, sequential and differentiated. They must be connected to the class curriculum if there is to be a positive and lasting impact on gifted students (Senate 2001, 3.59 p. 52).

Renegotiating excellence: equity and differentiation

The early years of the new millennium witnessed yet further policy changes impacting on teachers' work and the provision of support for the education of gifted children. The longstanding tensions identified earlier in this chapter between equity and excellence, and between common and differentiated curriculum, resurfaced with a particular urgency in the early 2000s.

A change of Victorian government in 1999 and the election of a Labor government on a platform to reform education brought what some commentators such as Andrew Bolt (2005, p. 19) called a reversal back to the 'anti-elitism of our educationalists'. Discussing the Education Minister's refusal to allow further SEAL schools or classes to be established, Bolt suggested that '[W]e get so scared of admitting that some children are academically smarter than others that we abolish streaming' (Bolt 2005, p. 19). Yet, at the same time as not allowing the expansion of programs for the academically gifted, the Education Minister, Lynne Kosky, showed no reticence in granting permission for establishing Victoria's first elite sports school, Maribyrnong College (2007a; Tomazin 2004), reflecting the extent to which sport is truly valued within Australian culture. The College (2007b, n. p.) does not shy away from utilising the term "elite" and reflects none of the cultural anxiety generally associated with academic elitism and invites '[S]tudents identified as having potential as elite athletes' to apply to the school. It tempers the focus on the physical by offering an holistic educational approach balance so that '[A]ll students are challenged and encouraged to achieve personal excellence in academic pursuits' (2007b, n. p.). Robert Carroll, the Maribyrnong College Sports Director emphasises that '[T]he point of difference with Maribyrnong and others is that Maribyrnong will be the only government specialist school; the other specialisms pretty much run off their own school council and funding' (Tarica 2007, n. p.). However, by 2006, and one suspects in electioneering mode, the Minister for Education, Lyn Kosky withdrew her objections to more SEAL schools saying that it was time to establish at least two more selective schools in Victoria. She described her previous opposition in terms of being part of a system unprepared for such a

direction (Ker & Rood 2006). Rood (2006), observes that although parent demand for choices within the public sector might have led to such an about-face, there was little public debate regarding any comparative impact of the elite schools versus mainstream comprehensive schools. Some, such as Mary Bluett, president of the Australian Education Union (Victoria), continued to regard the Select Entry Accelerated Learning program as elitist, with the potential to not only drain resources from surrounding schools but as an opportunity for business and industry to influence curriculum or provide additional funding as a long term marketing investment for potential human resources (see Dunn 2005; Tarica 2007). Such a situation signals the quandaries that arise when private sector support and funding is provided for public schools; an issue that remains controversial in educational policy discussion, yet has been raised as a possibility for providing specialist schooling.

Brian Caldwell, a noted educationalist and former Dean of Education at the University of Melbourne was reported (Tarica 2007) to hold the view that public-private partnerships require consideration, particularly for capital works, and that the specialist school movement (i.e. one offering a full curriculum with a focus on a particular domain such as music at Blackburn High School compared to a selective school which selects all students according to academic merit) has much to offer for dedicated curriculum development, expert teachers and talented students. He argues that a “one-size-fits-all” model for secondary schools is a cautious and outdated approach with research evidence indicating that schools in disadvantaged settings would benefit the most from public-private partnerships.

Changing times and current directions

Certainly matters have changed considerably for gifted students since the 1980s when the Gifted Children Task Force Secondary Schools Division (GCTFSSD) first began lobbying for gifted student provision. In a recent personal reflection on teacher practice concerning the gifted and talented, Southern Metropolitan Regional (SMR) Teaching and Learning Consultant, SMR gifted education contact and former Task Force member (Ministry of

Education 1987), Derek Steenholdt (2006) presents a very rosy view of current gifted teaching practices in Victoria. He ‘considers the learning needs of gifted and talented students are now being better met through regular teaching and learning practice’ (2006, p. 12). To support his comparative position, he cites the use of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson et al. 2001; Anderson & Sosniak 1994) creative thinking strategies and co-operative learning, activities in schools such as Tournament of Minds and Future Problem Solving as well as mentoring, enrichment and SEAL schools. Aside from the latter point and mentoring, I suggest that the former are all components of what we now consider to be “good teaching” and are not specifically designed for gifted students. These are “broad brush” approaches; and whilst admirable, do not expressly cater for gifted students unless they are carefully embedded within individual school policies whereby curriculum statements, with clear aims and objectives document the necessary concepts and skills that all students will be taught within the mandated curriculum yet provide specific pathways and a long term focus for gifted students. Even so, there is much to laud as child-centred practices, first proposed in the early 1920s have resurfaced to inform present day educators of individual differences (see, for example, Anderson et al. 2001; Baldwin & Vialle 1999; McGrath & Noble 2005; McInerney & McInerney 2006); which also means (almost by default) a re-focused attention on highly able or “gifted” students. There is now a smorgasbord of options currently available to schools compared with what was available when the GCTFSSD first began advocating for gifted provision. Apart from those mentioned by Steenholdt (2006), Victorian State schools can choose from VCE extension studies, concurrent enrolment in two institutions, early admission to school or tertiary study, curriculum compacting, year level advancement, single subject acceleration, telescoping, grouping for instruction, virtual mentoring and supplementary programs such as the ‘Virtual School for the Gifted’ (DEECD 2008a; Joyce 2005/2006; VAGTC 2006/2007).

Ignoring the *Bright Futures* policy and associated professional development of the previous Government, by merely alluding to previous programs run by the education department, Steenholdt (2006), suggests that ‘[T]here have been wonderful professional development opportunities focusing on the educational

and social/emotional needs of gifted and talented children' (p, 13). What he fails to mention is that all such professional development, whether provided by the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, Gifted Education Research Centre, Department of Education Science and Training (DEST), the Victorian education department or by universities (for example, "Bright Sparks" at Deakin University [2001]) is voluntary. The *Bright Futures* professional development is no longer offered or required by the Victorian education department; for schools or teachers wishing to undertake gifted professional development, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) (2006), directs interested parties to the DEST Learning Package devised by Gross et al. (2005). Although it appears that the *Bright Futures* policy remains valid (Joyce 2005/2006), Victoria has not overtly acknowledged its official policy on the education of gifted students since the change of government in 1999. The DEECD remains coy about gifted education (2008b n. p.), but it does state that '[R]ather than a definition, we have endeavoured to present a commonly-accepted position of what it is to be a gifted student in Victorian schools' (DEECD 2007c, n. p.). Perhaps signalling normalisation of the term "gifted" in education (despite on-going debates), the DEECD has now clearly adopted Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) acknowledging a specific and particular stance towards giftedness and talent which is consistent with other Australian education departments. Perhaps this is what the DEECD means by a 'commonly-accepted position', if so, it becomes a policy statement by default. The DEECD is unafraid to use the term gifted but it does stress that the concept is a social 'construct and is not directly measurable' (DEECD 2007c n. p.) The inclusivity approach which recognises whole school diversity encompassing a 'range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including those with indigenous backgrounds, students learning English as a second language, high potential and gifted students, students with disabilities or chronic illness, students with varying beliefs about gender and sexuality, as well as students from different social and economic backgrounds' (DEECD 2008c, n. p.) firmly re-establishes gifted education within a social justice framework. But it does not in any way reduce any of the complexities of gifted education, particularly as gifted students are to be "found" within the categories as listed above, thus

opening a Pandora's box of "dual-differentiation" (see, for example, Baldwin & Vialle 1999; Castellano 2003; Vaughn, Bos & Schumm 2003). It might mean that for many schools and teachers, whole school diversity means striving for equality of outcomes rather than creating a culture of equality of opportunity; for observers such as Steenholdt (2006) the inclusivity approach means that 'there are still many areas for both governments and educators to apply recent research into gifted education and implement recommendations of Senate inquiries into education of gifted students' (p. 14).

Conclusion

A brief examination of Australian and specifically, Victorian educational history is important because it serves to contextualise the concerns surrounding the contemporary discourses and policies on gifted education. In this chapter, I have drawn on the work of a number of historians, key scholars and commentators who have examined the recurring themes and persistent tensions surrounding gifted education, with a particular focus on the struggle between egalitarianism and elitism. I have argued that progressive philosophical ideals held by teachers in the early 20th century withered in impractical or crowded classroom environments or were stymied by entrenched institutional practices such as lock-step promotion, and although gifted students were not the focus of the social justice policies of the Whitlam Federal Government, there were those in the community who were ready to highlight that gifted students were deserving of an education commensurate with their abilities. Despite a pervasive ethos of egalitarianism, in the mid 1990s, gifted students finally received recognition in Victoria, albeit as social capital, an investment in the future.

In the following chapters, I build on the background provided in Chapter Four and move from the "bigger picture" policy context of the Victorian *Schools of the Future* initiative to the implementation of such a policy, but especially that of the *Bright Futures* and its associated professional development program in one specific primary school in Melbourne, the case study site. In the next chapter, Chapter Five, I examine the school's philosophical approach to

excellence, connections and disjunctions between policy and practice and the world of teachers' work at Atlas Primary School.

Chapter Five

The school context: fostering excellence for all

In the following three chapters the focus of analysis shifts to a close up examination of the case study site and the complexities of the *mélange* that is teachers' work. Using a Foucauldian framework, I analyse how teachers, whilst working to improve the learning outcomes of all students are wedged between the power of formal school rhetoric and educational policy and formal school beliefs. This, in turn, has significant repercussions for addressing the needs of gifted students and generates considerable ambivalence about the implementation of gifted programs. I propose that such responses are important elements in the contemporary landscape of teachers' work. In this chapter, I discuss issues related to teachers' work and professional learning in general before specifically relating these areas to the education of gifted children. One particular focus is how teachers negotiate the relationship between personal and professional beliefs as well as tensions that can arise when their professional values are at odds with those expressed in government and policy requirements. A second focus is teachers' beliefs after a period of intensive professional development in gifted education and their gendered perceptions of the 'gifted child'. In developing this analysis, I draw extensively on teacher's own voices as they consider these themes, echoing Maxwell, Laird, Grundy and Warhurst (1994), who feel that judgements about teachers' work should be made by the teachers themselves as:

[T]eachers aim to understand particular events rather than to know in some objective sense. In so far as teachers act professionally they learn from what they do, since teachers have an obligation to critically question to increase their understanding and hence broaden the basis for their subsequent decision making and action (p. 198).

In this chapter, I provide descriptive and contextual detail of the case study site and of the professional and policy environment in which teachers were working at the time of the study. I draw directly on the fieldwork data gathered in the early 2000s as well as more recent observations and informal discussions to suggest some of the continuities (such as professional learning, commitment to teaching and community connectedness) in the school culture. By

integrating discussion of official school profiles and policies with my formal observations as a teacher/researcher, and those of teacher participants, I aim to illuminate the professional landscape and culture of this school within the general world of teachers' work. Foucault would describe the world of teachers' work as an example of the knowledge/power regime which 'is profoundly enmeshed in social structures' (1980b, p. 109). Such a regime gains 'access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes and modes of everyday behaviour' (Foucault 1980b, p. 125). An emphasised feature of the case study school is the prominent attention given to fostering excellence, an important contextual factor for understanding the expectations facing teachers in this school, and for their and the school community's perceptions of gifted education.

The chapter begins with an account of the school structure of Atlas Primary School (APS), and its published philosophies on student learning and teacher responsibilities in order to provide a context for understanding the reception of the *Bright Futures* Policy and the *Bright Futures* Professional Development (BFPD) program. The implementation of the BFPD is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six before discussing the gendered dimensions of teachers' work in Chapter Seven. Three main lines of argument are developed. The first concerns the relationship between teachers' personal beliefs and professional knowledge; the second situates these beliefs within the school's ethos of excellence and the third, how personal attitudes have a bearing on the value or otherwise of professional development.

Curriculum decision making in schools is influenced by many factors. Brenda Cherednichenko (2001) identifies four key fields operating within two distinct categories, that is, the school and community. First, within the school environment, there is educational delivery (teaching and learning) which includes curriculum provision, policies shaping that curriculum provision, resources and their means of distribution, school priorities regarding development plus the personal relationships between teachers, parents and students. Second, is the institutional profile or the corporate identity of the institution as represented by the School Charter, a document defining the

school, its practices and policies on all matters encompassing school uniform, values, traditions, school status, staff profiles, strategic development and future directions. The community influences the third and fourth fields of curriculum decision making. The identity of the students is shaped by their immediate socio-economic context, tempered by their cultural mix and/or diversity plus the community services, resources and the geographic location of the school. Finally, the global perspective (or macro-economic conditions), that is, government policies and structures, education departments and industrial relations influence school evolution and curriculum construction. Thus, any change or innovation as experienced by teachers such as the introduction of the *Curriculum Standards Framework* (CSF) or the *Bright Futures* (BF) policy is delivered at the intersection of the four key fields, the actual site where teachers practise their professional business. Cherednichenko (2001) also suggests that middle (and I suggest upper class and elite schools) manage to preserve “traditional” educational cultural expectations of the parent community even whilst implementing curriculum changes or implementing new policies (see also Lingard et al. 1999). Teachers are encouraged to extend their students’ social advantages by providing educational experiences which develop scholastic skills and lead to academic success, access to elite secondary schools, special programs and competitions for gifted and talented children - even if it means stifling preferred personal teaching and learning pedagogies. As supported by the information in the next section, I suggest that teachers working at Atlas Primary School are located within such a landscape.

Atlas Primary School

Atlas Primary School was established in 1917. It is comfortably middle class, situated in a pleasantly treed, residential area of eastern suburban Melbourne. It takes pride in its tradition of scholarship and learning, claiming a distinctive ethos that embraces cooperative and democratic decision making within a friendly, supportive and caring learning environment (APS website). In 2002, 580 students and their teachers were housed in 22 classrooms with full time specialist teachers for Library, Literacy, Visual Arts and Physical Education. Two teachers (junior and senior schools) were employed for Languages Other Than English (LOTE/Italian). Part time positions of varying time fractions

were provided in the areas of Music [.6], Challenges and Opportunities (C&O) and Reading Recovery [.5] and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)[.3] (APS document SC121002, 2002). The school is administered and regulated by a principal and an assistant principal who, in turn, are supported by a business manager, an administrative assistant and an Information Technology (IT) end-user support person. Also employed are two integration aides and two first aid assistants (APS Staff Information 2002 p. 1). In October 2008, the school gained the services of a School Chaplain, funded by the Federal Government (APS Bulletin 2008, issue 31). An educational psychologist and a speech therapist, assigned to, and shared by a cluster of four neighbouring schools are provided by the education department. One staff member, Marjorie, a teacher with 35 years of experience, the last twelve at APS, described the school as ‘homogeneous’, and for a State school, finding this ‘most unusual ... probably the last one in Victoria ... and probably one of the wealthiest socio-economic areas in Melbourne ... it’s unique really and unusually so’ (11, p. 4). These characteristics – a strong school sense of being ‘unique’ and pride in its traditions and commitment to excellence – are, as I elaborate below, important elements of the school culture, and key factors in understanding the milieu in which perceptions and practices to do with gifted education developed. More analytically, Atlas Primary School is located within and helps produce a particular regime of truth (Foucault 1980b) about school excellence which is shaped, produced and governed by diverse factors such as the power relations and expectations within its micro-community of students, teachers, school personnel and parents governed by the broader governmentality of State educational policies.

The teacher participants

The three male and thirteen female participants in the study were aged from 27 to 64 with an average of 25 years teaching and school experience between them, the youngest had four years teaching experience and the oldest 44 years. As exemplified by the tenure of the Principal who commenced in 1988, staff stability is a feature of APS. He observed that his then ‘Vice-Principal had been in the school for seventeen years’ (12 p. 6). Such staff stability not only signals a sense of continuity and permanence to the broader school community

but also suggests that teachers consider APS as a high status and desirable workplace. Three teachers have spent their entire teaching careers in this single locale (4-15 years); two have been at APS for over twenty years and the other ten teachers have been at APS for a period of 2-16 years having worked in different locales and schools prior to joining APS. The Principal considered that those ‘who have only taught at APS and I don’t [think] that’s a good thing - I think you need to have a variety of experiences, come into contact with different types of students, from different socio-economic backgrounds, and also different types of parents’ (12, p. 6).

Teacher concerns about tenure and stability

The upheavals to Victorian State schools with the introduction of self governance during the *Schools of the Future* period in the mid-nineties also brought the uncertainty of short term contracts for many teachers, particularly new graduates. To gain an on-going position, or at best, a three year contract in any school became a quest for many increasingly disillusioned teachers frustrated with the impermanence of their professional status, which included teachers on short term contracts in APS.³⁴ Teachers such as Marjorie feel that the current employment process is angst-filled and that once tenured, the lure of change, unless for reasons of promotion, no longer appeals. She reflected that:

normally I had always moved three to five years for variety and a change of scenery and new colleagues but it all seemed to lock up when transfer procedures altered – and we stayed. Unless you want promotion you don’t tend to go. You don’t go through all that rigmarole just to transfer to another location – particularly if you got only a three [year] contract to stay there and then you’re looking again. You’re on a treadmill. So people are staying put where they’ve got on-going and where they are already in place (11, pp. 3-4).

Jeff is wary of the motives for those who currently apply for promotion, saying that ‘I’m happy being Level 3. I have not been applying for jobs and things. I regard the higher level jobs as being destroyed effectively. The conditions that they’re done under now are so bad they’re just not worth doing. I regard people who apply for them as suspicious [sic] and dangerous’ (1, p. 30). He does not

³⁴ A former teacher of APS, now permanently employed at a neighbouring “like school,” spoke to me of her frustrations and personal anxiety when required to annually reapply for her position. Failing to gain a permanent position, she concluded that it was both her gender and her Greek heritage that influenced the Principal’s decision. (C. T. 2003 pers. comm. n. d.).

include the Principal and the Assistant Principal in his assessment as ‘they’re already there. They were involved in the whole scenario all before that new stuff happened so I don’t count them in but I think that you are definitely entitled to be very suspicious of people who apply for those jobs now’ (1, p. 30).

For the participant teachers, proximity to home appears to be a predominant reason for remaining at APS. Not one resides more than about eight kilometres from the school and children of three of the teachers attended or currently attend APS. One participant, Tamsin, who has worked at APS for nearly three decades and whose two daughters attended the school said:

I’ve been here for a long time but earlier than that I was changing just about every year, so I had about seven or eight schools, then taught overseas [Canada and England], and then sort of come here and became ensconced ... It’s that [stability of the position], but then the community you work in changes all the time too, and the children change from year to year so it is quite diverse and ... and the children are so different from year to year (9, p. 2).

Motives of convenience might govern staffing stability but professional reasons and the high academic standards of APS are also incentives for applying to, or remaining at, the school. The Principal said that ‘I always knew that this school had a good reputation’ (12, p. 5). Others note how well curriculum is implemented and believe ‘we’ve reached a situation where ours is *very* well managed and certainly compared to what I’ve seen in other schools. And other schools are starting to come and take our stuff and use it quite a bit for those very reasons; it is just so well worked out’ (1, p. 10; his emphasis). There is a depth of staff awareness to sustain the high expectations of both APS management and the parental community as ‘we’ve got a good reputation and we need to keep working and keep working at it to improve it further’ (14, p. 5). Teacher perceptions of parental expectations are further discussed later in this chapter.

A full time permanent teaching position provides both professional and personal educational benefits, enabling the development of good school community relationships and longitudinal observation of children’s developmental growth and maturity (Hatton 1985). Judith considers herself as

very fortunate ... because I've seen quite a few grades go from Prep to Grade 6, and I have watched these children over a period of time and some of your professional nous as to the talents of some of these children you see, the seeds are there as they go through the school; you see those seeds open up and those children often channel into those sorts of areas and expertise and talents and things like that. That's very rewarding and it's also very encouraging because you think, "Well, I had a feeling that that was how that child would go," and this is just proof, just being able to stand by and watch the direction that they've taken (13, p. 6).

The lure of teaching at APS entices some teachers back even after official retirement. Maintaining her status, the Assistant Principal continued working on an extended contract (APS 2002, pers. comm. May n. d.; Victoria Teachers Credit Union 2008) - albeit with initial reservations about the quirky nature of "retiring" then returning to her recently vacated position. Ruth periodically returns as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher employed on short term contracts or to proof read reports (15, 2008, pers. comm. June 2nd).

School climate

Attractive as permanent tenure, geographic convenience and working in an aspirational school community might be, the participant teachers do hold some reservations about the tenor of the school, which might be a result of the greater parental power that arose when the parental voice was strengthened and legitimised during the *Schools of the Future* period. This created a paradox between the high expectations placed on teachers to achieve the expected standardised learning outcomes for all students (or better in the case of APS) and the low status of teachers in the general community (Dinham 1997).

Marjorie feels that:

I think they [school community] are very orientated towards learning and succeeding but they've also got very much a feeling that we are there to serve. I have that sense from the children and also from the parents. You're here to serve me, to do your work, to make - you know, to make me successful. I feel I've got a very much a public servant feel here. I used to feel I had more authority and more command and perhaps more respect before - in some of the other schools I've worked in ... I think it's something to do with socio-economic; it might be to do with you know, "I'm a successful and important person and you're just a teacher and you're just here and you will do a certain amount of things like we expect you to do" (11, p. 5).

For Marjorie, the decline of her role as "the teacher as an authority figure" to one of a facilitator of learning is to be mourned as a loss of self, her sense of change contextualised by teaching career spanning more than three decades (see Kelly & Colquhoun 2003). Marjorie believes that:

I'm a lot less assertive – way less assertive and a lot less confident and a lot less personally idiosyncratic [*smiles*] less myself and more in the style of what I see as the expectations for the sort of person you have to be to fit in the parameters more neatly ... It's rather constricting, intellectually constricting I think because you stay on the narrow CSF and you don't diverge off into those little things when things happen, or your own interest or when a child brings in a specimen or a rock or something to "Morning Talk" and you go off for the day and talk about that; it all stays neatly inside its boxes and I stay inside my box as well (11, p. 5).

Similarly to colleagues elsewhere experiencing work related strains (for example, Dinham 1997; Kelly & Colquhoun 2003; Prichard 2006; Sturmfels 2006; Watt 2006), some participants spoke of continued or increasing levels of personal stress or anxiety and tensions within APS. Such strains are manifest whilst trying to manage a demanding workload focused on the maintenance of high standards and quality curriculum, constantly changing curricula foci, addressing individual student needs - as well as liaising with their parents - plus coping with an increasingly volatile Principal (according to Helen, Ruth and Eric) who, in all likelihood was experiencing his own stresses whilst managing his staff. Speaking about her colleague, Helen, the Visual-Arts specialist, who was on leave without pay, Ruth commented:

I doubt that she will return to school as I think it is all too stressful now. Writing reports twice a year for 600+ students is not a joke and the powers that be don't seem to understand at all. Apart from that is the grind of constant teaching, meetings, yard duty etc. etc. Helen was having to work until quite late each night and, I feel almost entirely unappreciated. It was just expected (15, 2007, pers. comm. 8 Nov).

Helen herself spoke of always being 'talked down to' and that things are 'so tense at APS that we start to feel like a bit of dirt' (4, 2007, pers. comm. 8th Feb). Another colleague said that 'I keep my head down, do my job, get paid' (L. S. 2004, pers. comm. 14th Feb), whilst one of the Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teachers endeavours to 'remain on courteous terms [with the Principal]. We bid each other "Good morning" and I don't get too chummy or it might backfire' (J. Q. 2004, pers. comm. 14th Feb). Eric (16, 2004, pers. comm. 14th Feb), barely containing his incredulity, reported that when staff were in their own Staffroom signing a card for a colleague which read "You're a star!" the Principal furiously berated his staff in front of a group parents (parents use the Staffroom at will) for he disagreed with the card's sentiment. However, despite misgivings about tensions within APS, it remains a location where many teachers choose to stay.

School image and striving for excellence

Pam, a relative newcomer with three years service at the school, considers the APS culture as a 'collective and there's a very definite depth of awareness amongst staff members of the expectations of the parent community and management in the school, that we've got a good reputation and we need to keep working and keep working at it to improve it further and so on' (14, p. 5). In his final message to a cohort of Grade Six students making the transition to secondary schools, in 1995, the Principal exhorted the students 'to be positive at all times and continue to pursue excellence' (APS Year Book 1995, p. 2). Excellence by the students, whether for performances in or out of school, is publicly acknowledged. Acknowledgements are made at Monday morning assemblies where recognition and/or prizes and awards for school based activities, such as House Competitions, interschool sports, chess, Tournament of the Mind, choral performances, the Premier's Reading Challenge or national science and maths competitions are presented. The school also uses the weekly Bulletin to publish these details, as well as saluting diverse out-of-school achievements, for instance, performance in commercial stage productions, such as "Billy Elliott the Musical" or placement in a fencing competition (see, for example, APS Bulletin, 2008, p. 2). Some school based successes are reported in the local press³⁵, and reports of private individual endeavours, even in instances when the student has moved on to secondary school, acknowledge the APS ethos of excellence. Such practices are not common to all State primary schools which might take a more egalitarian approach to success. Janet, another relative newcomer of three years observes:

Here at APS, I think it's probably one of the schools I've been to where they do acknowledge, I mean the Principal in assembly, will allow the children that have done well in sport to get up and say something, or done well at gymnastics whereas the school I've previously come from, wasn't even allowed to go in the newspaper for a pat on the back because it's something they do out of school ... Just this morning there was someone playing, a little Grade Two girl playing violin, so I think it's very good that he does that. I've been to, as I said, the school before didn't want to know whether they'd just won the football trophy ... they just thought ... they get enough kudos from out of school for that ... Well I think that's [benefit of acknowledgement] helping in the acceptance of others, so like in that field of music that may have been considered sissy, if the Principal's saying it's fine and the teachers can see that he's saying it's fine then that comes back to teachers and then it falls into the children and the parents, well the community, and so that everyone tends to accept children's different talents, or different abilities (10, p. 11; her emphasis).

³⁵ Specific articles published in the press have not been cited in order to protect the anonymity of the school.

Atlas Primary School has a strong identity within the community as a “feeder school” for elite secondary private Independent schools and church schools. For example, at the end of 1995, of 63 Grade 6 students, 33 (52%) were accepted into 13 non-government schools; 30 (48%) students went to five State Government secondary schools (APS Year Book 1995), one of which is a Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) school, another with a High Achievers program and a third which provides an all-girls education emphasising ‘pride in being female’ (www.cgsc n. d). In 1996, 64% enrolled in non-government schools, compared to the Australian figure of just over 29% that same year (Mukherjee 1999), but although the 1997 result was more evenly divided, with 45% choosing to attend non-government schools and 55% heading for State secondary schools and colleges (see APS Year Book 1997, 1996, 1995), the percentage of students moving to non-government secondary schools is still higher than the State and national averages.

A corporate look

Atlas Primary School is predisposed to change implementation; as Marjorie said, ‘when there is a directive from “Head Office” as I call it we go for it’ (11, p. 8). New policies are enthusiastically embraced, but the Principal appears particularly fervent about changes which endorse teacher accountability and signal to the community APS’s teacher professionalism. For example, in the late 1990s, the Principal, hoping to project a corporatised public image of the school, an enactment reflecting the dominant neo-liberal politics of the time, proposed that all office staff and teachers should be uniformly attired in a navy blue uniform bearing the school logo. Although some teachers adopted “the corporate look”, save for the office staff who adopted the uniform, the initiative failed.³⁶ In a 2007 submission to the Government Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools, the Principal wrote, ‘I strongly support the wearing of school uniforms [for students]’ but also stressed that:

³⁶ Always considering myself as professionally dressed and in no need of fashion guidance, I confess to having purchased a blazer as a souvenir of the very notion and I consciously chose to “play the game” of “Please-the-Principal” wearing it when I went further a-field representing the school as a *Bright Futures* trainer. The general consensus among APS staff was that the uniform was a “Bank of Melbourne look” (Field notes).

there is a lack of dress code for Government employed teachers ... some teachers do not understand what is acceptable for them to wear as role models for their students ... I encourage them [the Government] to establish a dress code for teachers ... I urge the Department of Education to mandate uniform [for students] in all schools (Principal 2007, n. p.).

The same year, a newspaper reported that a number of APS teachers were summoned to the Principal's office for a "dressing down" after arriving for work clothed in what he considered to be non-professional attire. The Principal feels he is now 'in a very invidious positions [sic]'³⁷ after the DEECD snubbed the inquiry's recommendation that a staff dress code be included in school uniform policies (see Education and Training Committee 2007, p. xii). It would appear that whilst wishing to normalise his staff's appearance, the Principal prefers to deflect the onus of responsibility back to the macro power that is the education department, so removing himself as the instigator of the ruling, preferring instead to perform a more regulatory rather than legislative role. But it might also support Lingard, Hayes and Mills' (1999) view that a marketing approach to school-based management functions well for advantaged communities. A uniformly clad staff would not only have symbolically represented the Principal's wholehearted acceptance of the *Schools of the Future* market based reforms, but if the staff had adopted a corporate image, the act would have reinforced the Principal's intentions to wield power by gaining compliance, conformity and control over his staff's appearance and therefore, their professional behaviour. Although APS teachers were obliged to accept the *Schools of the Future* market management approach to education, and might well be striving to attain standards of excellence commensurate with the Principal's ideals, they rejected the notion of doing so wearing a school uniform and completely resisted the marketing of the school with a corporate image advertising a "successful" and "excellent" product.

Legitimising the comprehensive curriculum

Atlas Primary School judiciously selects terminology to emphasise its positioning as a comprehensive State school simultaneously nurturing a culture of excellence and achievement. The school aims to provide 'a high quality, challenging and stimulating program across Prep-6 in the eight Key Learning

³⁷ Cited in a daily newspaper.

Areas’ (APS Charter 2000-2002, p. 5) and ‘have all children achieve appropriate levels of academic excellence and mastery of skills and knowledge, within the context of outcomes defined by CSF11 with emphasis on English and Mathematics’ (APS Charter 2000-2002, p. 4). Just what is understood by the rather ambiguous ‘appropriate levels of academic excellence’ is not clear but it is to be achieved by enhancing effective teaching and learning practices in English and Mathematics to ‘ensure that all students are suitably challenged to maximise their learning potential’ (p. 4). This was targeted as a priority improvement area, along with ‘the development and implementation of a more comprehensive program in Science’ (School Charter 2000-2002, p. 5).

The Atlas Primary School Charter (2000-2002, p. 1) states that it

offers students a broad, general curriculum in English, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Studies of Society and Environment ... [The School] also offers an extensive and comprehensive Information and Learning Technology Program across all Curriculum Standard Framework levels ... Our comprehensive curriculum is supported by specialist teachers in the areas of Reading Recovery, Philosophy, Visual and Performing Arts, Physical Education, Library and (LOTE) Italian, English as a Second Language and Challenges and Opportunities. A program operates for gifted and talented students and students requiring support. All children have the opportunity to participate in educational excursions, swimming, Bike Education, orchestra and chess club. Students from Years 3-6 are able to participate in the choir, recorder ensemble, concert band, a camping and touring program, cross country, athletics and interschool sports. Grade 5 and 6 students can also take part in an ‘Understanding Sexuality’ Program as part of Health Education. The school also offers a Christian Religious Education program for students from Prep-Grade 6. An out of school hours care program “Fun Care” is conducted in the School Hall.

This is supported by a learning and teaching policy which claims to

improve the quality of learning for all students in the school. The school aims to provide each student with a range of learning experiences through the Curriculum and Standards Framework which will:

- assist them to improve their own learning
- encourage them to be motivated, inquiring and independent learners
- promote excellence in learning
- develop their self esteem, confidence and independence

(APS Charter 2000-2002, p. 2);

provided by

[A] well qualified, enthusiastic and effective teaching staff who cater for individual differences and build upon previous knowledge, skills and experiences to link learning so that it is relevant to real life situations. Teachers will maximise learning by using a wide variety of teaching methods and strategies. Their active involvement in professional development facilitates improved teaching and learning outcomes (p. 2).

Pam, again comparing her work at APS with previous locations, feels that ‘[T]he whole school’s program has really been well researched. If the students come in at Prep and leave in Grade 6, they’ve got an *enormous* breadth and depth of programs available to them’ (14, p. 20; her emphasis). In comparison with her experience in other primary schools, she feels that ‘the diversity of co-curricular activities, all of that’s not a normal primary school sort of setting’ (14, p. 6).

The meritocracy of schooling: the role of parents

Atlas Primary School invites general parental involvement in many areas of the school such as class excursions and activities, sport, bike education, music and the arts, the School Council and associated committees plus the canteen. Attendance at education fora, information nights and Parents’ Club is encouraged (School Charter 2000-2002 p. 2), but this does not mean that parents are always willing or able to attend or participate in various activities, or that parents conduct themselves in a manner that meets with the Principal’s approval such as by constantly chatting during the Monday morning assembly (APS staff minutes 1996, p. 1). One exasperated parent wrote ‘How much more free labour can parents give?’ to requests for voluntary parental involvement (APS 1996, p. 4). More recently, pleas to attend Working Bees resulted in only ‘seven parents and children’ with the Principal asking for ‘ideas on how we can overcome this problem’ (APS Bulletin 2008, issue 32, p. 1). A recently held Art Exhibition, was considered ‘a huge success’ because of the ‘impressive, professional planning and organisation’ by the coordinator was achieved with a ‘small, but energetic, enthusiastic committee’ (APS Bulletin 2008, issue 33, p. 1). The Principal said that ‘[W]e often put things in the Bulletin, [but] getting them to read the Bulletin!’ (12, p. 20). This is a particular challenge for APS when an educational forum with a specific theme and target audience is prepared. The Principal states that ‘[P]arent education is a challenge for us all because you don’t often get the *audience* that you believe you should be getting (12, p. 20; his emphasis). For example, when APS hosted a session featuring a consultant psychologist specialising in children with educational and behavioural problem, the school sent out invitations ‘to certain families we believe that you know would *really* benefit from listening

to Judith Papahzy - they didn't come' (12, p. 21; his emphasis). Thus, the targeted parental group, by their non-attendance at the school organised seminars, confirmed the Principal's assessment of their deficit parenting abilities, at the same time challenging his authority and, perhaps in some way, invalidating his administration through non-compliant behaviour.

Outcomes-based education: tensions in the partnerships between parents and teachers

The case study participants are aware of parental expectations and the insistence from both parents and administrators to maintain high standards for both students and teachers. Pam feels that

there's a very definite depth of awareness amongst staff members of the expectations of the parent community and management in the school, that we've got a good reputation and we need to keep working and working at it to improve it further and so on. The most significant component is also probably home-driven but the students have a much better awareness of their role and their responsibilities as students compared to other schools that I've been in (14, p. 5).

Janet concurs as 'it's a very strong community and the parents here are *all* very interested in their children ... whether they succeed right through their education' (10, p. 15). For some teachers, this work can be done in partnership. An open two-way collaboration between parents and teachers can, as noted by Zammit et al. (2007), contribute significantly to quality teaching and student outcomes. Louise, for example, believes that 'the parents' perception has to be listened to' (2, p. 26) and whilst Ruth agrees because 'sometimes they are right and they do know the children better than we do, obviously', she also wonders if parents are 'seeing what they want to see or whether they're seeing their children as they really are' (15, p. 13). Melanie thinks it is 'fine, especially in the Prep year' (3, p. 19) for parents to request individualised teaching for particular skills or learning strategies, yet her Prep teaching colleague, Celeste, states that APS is unable to acquiesce and provide professional support from an educational psychologist 'because that was a parental request' (7, p. 12). Even so, Celeste, considers any family support that generates a positive self-belief in the Prep children she teaches as a strength and 'can never be negated, it can never be lessened ... it's a very powerful thing' (7, p. 16) which might also contribute to the parents needed sense of efficacy as they contribute to their child's emotional development and ultimate school success (Grolnick et

al., 1997; Hill & Craft 2003; McInerney & McInerney 2006). But if some parents wish to influence teaching strategies for the benefit of their children, there are other parents who do not communicate with the school. The Principal opines that

[I]t's not all one-way at all ... it is a loop, you know the parents have to be providing communication to *us* as well as the school providing it to the parents and so I think ... that a lot of the parents don't communicate with us enough and don't tell us some very crucial things about their children (12, p. 22).

Despite generally positive feelings regarding parental-teacher partnerships, Fleur, the educational psychologist, senses a tension between some teachers and some parents 'who ask for changes to curriculum. I think [the parents] are often treated as a nuisance, extra work, demanding, know-all, so they sometimes don't get a positive response and they feel like they're being a nuisance so they back off' (8, p. 7) (see Chapter Six for further discussion of parent-teacher relationships related to the Challenges and Opportunities program). But Fleur understands the reasons for this attitude because 'some of the parent groups, I think, are over-militant and it's like "The school is your enemy. You must conquer. You must push. You must be assertive. You must -" and so on and that doesn't help either' (8, p. 7). Such aggressive parental advocacy might explain why Marjorie (as previously discussed) senses a loss and diminution of her professional standing and status whilst Celeste, an early career teacher, is aware of a difference between her own and the parental community's socio-economic status which she describes as 'wealthy' (7, p. 10). But parental demands and assertiveness leads Ruth to surmise that a 'lot of parents are very pushy' (15, p. 13). The Assistant Principal is aware of 'parents who are very eager for their children to excel academically or you know [in a] sporting sense and some in a musical sense' (5, p. 13). Such comments signal that the evaluations and expectations of teachers and parents are not always aligned (Zammit et al., 2007). The Assistant Principal suggests that parental expectations can cause performance anxieties in children. She says 'you get perfectionist children everywhere, but I think here we probably have more children who are worried about getting every little thing right and maybe don't value the little things they do for the value it deserves' (5, p. 13). When handing out reports, Pam is constantly surprised with 'the eagerness and the

importance that the students receive them [it] is very much more significant than it's been in other schools' (14, p. 6). Pam also considers that '[A] parent expectation might not necessarily be fair, right and reasonable [and can] be something that's dumped on the child' (14, p.15). Forewarned by colleagues of high parental expectations of both their children and of the teachers, nonetheless, Pam situates and understands this as a partnership between all those involved:

there were the warnings were given to me when I arrived about the level of that and I must say that I haven't in my personal experience found that to be unreasonable. Most parents are appreciative when you're indicating that there's a shortcoming in their child's current performance – they're usually well aware of it; that's not news that they weren't expecting. They're often very appreciative because you've been honest and set up some sort of process to you know bring about the desired change. There hasn't been the negative impact of expectations. And the students, while they set a high standard for themselves, they know their business is the real learning part of their day's existence and so I s'pose it warrants there's the three way stream (14, p. 6).

Despite some tensions and differences of professional opinion between teachers and parents, the pervading educational ethos of Atlas Primary School is shared by the wider community. It is summed up by Janet who said:

I think it's a very strong community and the parents here are *all* interested in their children ... where they don't just send their child to school, come home and don't even care what's going on. I think here the whole community are [sic] very interested in whether their child, even teachers, in whether the children succeed right through their education (10, p. 15; her emphasis).

Excellence is a key feature of the official culture and parental expectations of Atlas Primary School and it is not a foreign notion for both parents and teachers to promote excellence thus enhancing the school's strong reputation. Although some reservations are held by teachers and administrators related to parental involvement, it nonetheless remains a strong factor within APS culture. Excellence is directly related to my concerns here and is an integral part of the climate in which an initiative for gifted education was proposed, albeit by the *Bright Futures* policy and is further elaborated in Chapter Six.

Teachers' work

Teaching is a complex, holistic profession (see, for example, Dinham 1997; Kelly & Colquhoun 2003). Attempting to elucidate the myriad of responsibilities associated with the profession, Bruce Haynes (1997) categorises the teacher as professional, bureaucrat, participant, corporate member and policy maker (pp. 230-236). Correspondingly, university faculties

of education inculcating undergraduates to the profession, utilise text books that endeavour to capture the essence of teaching. These are ordered into discrete categories encompassing learning and teaching, classroom management, developmental psychology, curriculum and social and cultural influences on teaching such as multiculturalism, social class and gender (see, for example, Arthur, Gordon & Butterfield 2003; Hatton 1994; McInerney & McInerney 2006). In schools, neophyte teachers quickly realise that tidy categorisations are an illusion and to have a day “just teaching” is a rarity. Teaching involves determining appropriate pedagogical approaches such as direct instruction, co-operative learning, peer tutoring, individualised instruction, computer-assisted learning, behaviour modification, student contracts, media assisted instruction, scientific enquiry, mentoring by specialists and problem solving units (Haberman 1994). Then “acts of teaching” are performed, such as giving information and directions, asking questions, creating and reviewing assignments, tests and homework, marking papers and allocating grades, settling disputes, monitoring seatwork and punishing non-compliance (Haberman 1994). Teachers also become “multi-skilled”, as they learn to attend to and manage ancillary and clerical duties such as record keeping, marking attendance rolls, organising excursion venues, associated transport, permission slips and money; attending staff meetings, conducting parent meetings and/or interviews; planning for curriculum as well as doing yard - and the more mundane - kitchen duty. Teachers are required to go beyond concentrating on teaching and learning, which of itself requires catering for diverse abilities within mainstream classrooms. Teachers attend to those with exceptional cognitive prowess, physical or health issues and at-risk students (and perhaps work with support agencies and teacher-aides), whilst juggling all the social, emotional and interpersonal dilemmas that arise in the world of human interaction. As observed by the Schools Council, National Board of Employment Education and Training (SCNBEET)(1990 cited in Hatton 1994, p. 181), ‘[T]eaching is an intensely human activity’, and among teachers, reflecting the diversity of the community from which they are drawn, are both “good” and “bad”; there are optimists, cynics, hard workers and drones. Teachers are influenced by their own life histories, their age, gender, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. All teachers work within schools

which are in and of themselves a microcosm of life with its hopes, fears and uncertainties; they work and deal with the value laden subjectivities inherent in not only the parent community hoping for the best educational outcomes for their offspring, but that of colleagues and administration. But as Kelly and Colquhoun (2003) suggest, the policy of self-managing schools has created 'transformations in the nature of teachers' work and the ways in which teachers' work is regulated and managed' (p. 194). One of the ramifications of devolution from State regulation is that 'teachers and schools [are now] responsible for addressing a range of issues that *traditionally* were not concerns for schools' (p. 195), issues that I suggest were once under the moral guardianship of institutions such as the church and the personal responsibility of families.

Teaching is tiring work

Physically and mentally, teaching is tiring work. Jennifer Bradford's (1999) evaluation is that it

beats on both body and soul in ways that most people do not fathom. Our day involves incessant standing, walking, squatting, and kneeling ... Consider the emotional exhaustion that comes from comforting kids in trouble, kids with trigger tempers, and parents without hope. Consider the effort it takes to create out of a whole cloth a lesson that will meet the needs and desires of everyone- students, parents, administrators, national critics (p. 67).

As Louise says 'I find there's enough to do in leading a full life without having to spend more time, more responsibility here [at APS], doing what I'm doing and fitting in everything else' (2, p. 1). It can also be constrained by inappropriate physical accommodation. Although many teachers at APS enjoy spacious or remodelled classrooms, some, such as Louise and Jeff and their classes of 32 students have been squeezed into small relocatable classrooms, described by Jeff as 'a dogbox ... designed to work with you sitting in your desk and just being quiet and turning to your textbook and just doing page forty six' (1, p. 24). According to Jeff, 'kids are *energetic* people' (1, p. 24), so he allows them work outside their confines, albeit with reservations because

there are problems, it is problematic you are not supposed to do that ... my kids are in the broad scheme of things ...in terms of our school, they're like they've been permanently drinking red cordial and they're hypo and ... they're good and they're not real disobedient or whatever, but ... you've got to supervise them. I let them go and work on the little bat tennis court area outside the room and keep an eye on them or sometimes I'll make them sit outside the window where I can see them (1, p. 24).

As an advocate of activity-based learning, Jeff tries to convey his philosophical approach to the parents of his charges at the Information Night held at the beginning of each school year, but he senses that the parents do not share his more “laissez-faire” philosophical approach to teaching and learning. He believes that the last thing children wish to do is ‘Sit down and colour neatly ... yet the whole school is predicated or educated or whatever on what is not actual learning behaviour I think’ (1, p. 24). He challenges the parents to consider ‘what counts as good learning behaviour? ... What/where did you learn effectively? What helped you to learn? I say this to parents too, and I don’t think they fully buy it’ (1, p. 25). Jeff encapsulates some of the complications that emerge enacting the seemingly simple job of “being a teacher” as he explains his views on teaching and learning and how he feels they are at variance to APS traditions, parental expectations and the constraints of the relocatable classroom.

Teachers’ understanding of power and knowledge

But if teachers’ work is complex and multi-dimensional, teachers are also immersed in relations of power. Foucault (1976), argues that when investigating the relations of domination one ‘should be 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’ (p. 96). These capillaries might well drain into what Donald Schön (1986), calls a swampy lowland’, where ‘messy, confusing problems defy technical solution’ (p. 3). It is in these ‘swampy zones of practice’ (p. 3), that one finds the day-to-day ‘messy indeterminate situations’ (p. 4) of teachers work. Overlooking the quagmire, on the higher grounds of governmentality, the regime of technical rationality houses the neo-liberal outcomes-based curriculum, that is concerned with students as human capital who will eventually service a global market plus their parents, as consumers of education (Apple, 2005). Schön (1986), believes that practitioners have a choice between remaining on the high ground of professional knowledge and solving ‘relatively unimportant problems according to prevailing standards of rigor’, or deciding ‘to descend to the swamp of important problems and

nonrigorous inquiry' (p. 3). But, if Foucault perceives large institutions as sinister agencies functioning within a system of hierarchical exclusions regulating both subjects and populations, then it can also be argued from a Foucauldian perspective that teachers' ordinary work and the 'seemingly mundane practices of everyday life have profound social meaning' (Cohen 2005, p. xx). Despite education department obsession with regulatory practices such as outcomes-based education which also attempts to homogenise students, school communities consolidate their identity by aligning themselves with particular approaches such as whether or not to embrace gifted education. This aligns with the Foucauldian notion that power extends beyond a "meta-power" and is exercised at a grass roots level, 'since each individual has at his disposal a certain power, and for that very reason can also act as the vehicle for transmitting a wider power' (Foucault 1980a, p. 72), such as teachers choosing which messy indeterminate situation will be their focus. Teachers might well possess a micro-power in deciding what will be personally attended to in the swampy zone of practice, but it is a limited power, for as Berlach (2004) argues, schools and teachers do not possess the power to create and control conditions of, for example, school success for all students within an outcomes-based model. This is because external factors such as personal motivation, parental encouragement and socio-economic status have a bearing on successful learning; although in considering a broader landscape, Maxwell et al. (1994), argue that '[S]chool communities are not powerless with respect to the curriculum' (p. 198) as school behaviours and organisation, including evaluation and professional development also determine curriculum practices.

Teachers' professional learning at Atlas Primary School

To achieve the Charter goals across all Curriculum Standard Framework 11 levels (VCAA 2002), teachers are required to familiarise themselves with the range of student outcomes across all curriculum areas enabling moderation of the expected standards of achievement (APS Charter 2000-2002, p. 4). The obligation to undertake professional development (PD) is not confined to Atlas Primary School but is part of state wide expectations and is in common with "like-schools" to APS. It is expected that each year, teachers will undertake

professional development, generally related to current government guidelines implemented by the education department. This expectation is reflected in questions asked at the annual review (Department of Education Victoria n. d.) reflecting the notion that working as a professional educator involves life long knowledge acquisition about learning and teaching to realise the aim of being a “good teacher”. Teachers are also expected to ‘[E]nhance Professional Development processes to ensure teachers needs and school priorities are met’ (APS Charter 2000-2002, p. 6) and for ‘[I]mprovement in Professional Development Program ... to remain a focus as part of the Professional Recognition Program’ [PRP] (APS Charter 2000-2002, p. 7). In conjunction, teachers are also required to make certain ‘[T]hat the extension activities and thinking initiatives be expanded and incorporated into the normal program across all CSF levels’ (APS Charter 2000-2002, p. 5) whilst simultaneously maintaining and broadening [E]xtension/Thinking activities and special programs: Chess club, Junior School Council, Tournament Of Minds, Gateways³⁸, Cluster Groups, Philosophy’ (APS Charter 2000-2002). Students considered “at risk” ‘such as those on Education Maintenance Allowance [EMA], boys and others whose progress warrants special attention and monitoring’ were to be targeted as an “improvement area” (APS Charter 2000-2002, p. 4). Girls are not mentioned.

Improvements are measured at APS using school specific processes such as school audits and surveys of classroom practices and activities, tests of student learning; common state-wide approaches such as student attendance, mandated time allocations for each Key Learning Area (KLA), expected student achievement levels, School Early Assessment (SEA), Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) and parent opinion surveys; plus benchmarks such as comparison with “Like Schools” data related to attendance, achievement levels, past performance of specific student cohorts on Independent Observation Surveys and LAP/AIM Past Performance

³⁸ I have reproduced the typographical errors as in the original documents (for example Gateways). G.A.T.E.WAYS (Gifted and Talented Education, Extension and Enrichment), is an independent, non funded organisation established by two former secondary school teachers in 1994, to provide intellectually challenging programs and workshops for primary and secondary school students with ‘like-minds’ (<http://www.gateways.edu.au/about.htm>, n. p.).

assessments. It seems that teachers at Atlas Primary School are under some pressure regarding not only student performance but their own ability to maximise student outcomes. There are numerous surveillance mechanisms in place which are applied with particular vigour and relish. As the Principal recently wrote about a Staff Opinion Survey, '[W]hen working in such a healthy organisation, our challenge is to measure the value-added [sic] to the students' results, by our school' (APS Bulletin 2008, issue 26, p. 1).

School governance and the professional development formation of teachers

In general, professional development statements within the 2000-2002 APS Charter are non-specific and spare in detail, hinting that PD will enhance current teaching practices (p. 10) not only, but especially in Science class programs (p. 13). Boys and their literacy learning needs were singled out for attention (p. 10) as a PD target area but for which particular age group is unclear. What is also unclear is the reason for this focus, as APS consistently achieves above the State average in both English and Mathematics testing, and matches the standards of its Like School Group (LSG). The AIM results for English and Mathematics are consistently above the benchmark means (APS Charter 2003). Conditional statements, for example, '[T]hat the enhancement of the use of effective teaching and learning practices in English and Mathematics Programs *should be undertaken* to ensure that all students are suitably challenged to maximise their learning potential (School Charter 2000-2002, p. 9; my emphasis) are juxtaposed as directives for staff development such as '[A]ppropriate professional Development for staff *will be undertaken ... will be trained ... strategies will be compiled* and put into regular use across the school' (APS Charter 2000-2002, p. 10; my emphasis).

Priority learning areas in 2000-2002 Charter were English and Mathematics. APS staff were expected to undertake PD designed to enhance 'effective teaching and learning practices in English and Mathematics ... to ensure that all students are suitably challenged to maximise their learning potential' (APS Charter 2000-2002 p. 9), linked according to initiatives and grade levels: Early Years Programs for English and if applicable, Mathematics and Early Years Numeracy (P-4/Levels 1-3)(pp. 10-11); Early Years Speaking and Listening

(P-2/Levels 1-2); Chemical Science and Earth and Space Science (P-6/Levels 1-4) and Middle Years (5-6/Level 4).

As previously indicated in this chapter, Marjorie has rather wryly noted the speed with which education department directives and populist themes are adopted by APS. The Principal, reporting on a seminar for Principals of Victorian Government Schools wrote that “I came away feeling very pleased, as our school has already adopted many of the strategies proposed for ‘continuous improvement’ (APS 2007, issue 22, p. 1). It has been reported that older teachers view the provision and costs of professional development (plus the necessary classroom time release) as the responsibility of the employer to provide the course, pay the costs and time release from the classroom to attend (Milburn 2008; Parliament of Victoria 2008). The expectation that staff will be at the forefront of current initiatives causes frustration and tension related to money and time at APS when ‘we are encouraged to improve our skills and then you’ve got to [personally] pay a hundred and ninety [Australian dollars] or something to go for a day presentation’ (8, p.7) before returning to school to write ‘things like policy statements and plans of one kind or another which never see light of day again and by the time that all is done, well by then something new’s happened you know; new versions of this and that, so people just give up’ (1, p. 31).

Disgruntled though some may be, Tamsin considers professional development as vitally important, ‘particularly to young teachers. A lot of older teachers can get it with experience but to be aware is really important’ (9, p. 5). This sentiment is echoed by the Assistant Principal who counts her many years of teaching service and being ‘older and wiser and more experienced’ (5, p. 5) in conjunction with professional development as informing her current professional expertise. Maria, one of the relatively “young” teachers, said, ‘I quite enjoy it – it’s learning’ (6, p. 10). Learning from PD has also assisted another “young teacher” whilst juggling the demands of group work. By consistently implementing questioning techniques during whole class reading sessions learnt during a “Philosophy Day” PD, Celeste has inadvertently modelled approaches now adopted by her Prep students. Whilst working with

an individual child during a literacy session, she observed another group ‘just start chatting about the book ... having this discussion’ (7, p. 20) and asking each other probing questions. This was a pleasant surprise for Celeste who said, ‘it’s moments like that you just go, “That is wonderful!” and as I said, it [PD] does inform your teaching’ (7, p. 20).

Professional development: teachers’ priorities

Similarly to Fung (2000), who argues that professional learning contributes to teachers’ practice, plus personal and social development, the teachers in this study (e.g. Celeste and Tamsin) understand that PD is a vital and important component of their work. It is seen as an opportunity to further their understanding of children’s learning pathways (9, p. 5) or to consider alternative approaches to teaching for ‘you get stuck in your own little ideas’ (6, p. 10) perhaps even becoming complacent (7, p. 18). Not only is PD an aspect of life long professional learning in a world where ‘things change so much ... we need to be exposed to what’s going on at the moment’ but it is also something that not only ‘you owe to yourself but you also owe it to all the kids in your room’ (7, p. 18). The Principal considers that he has ‘encouraged teachers always [to do PD because] you’re keeping yourself conversant with what the latest trends are’ (12, p. 13) and although these exhortations might ultimately be to address mandated Government and ministerial policies, he too, desires that teachers develop an awareness of current thinking so ‘we might better deliver a good program for the children’ (12, p. 13).

Others, like Jeff, take a more meta-cognitive approach, reflecting upon their classroom practice asking, ‘[w]hat am I supposed to do? ... [w]hat am I going to do that I wasn’t doing last week as a result of this PD?’ (1, p. 9). PD becomes a springboard for further professional reading and deliberation of practice. Welcoming professional exchange, Judith, prefers ‘being able to sit down as a team and look at the units that we do ... because it’s very valuable to get back not only with your own level but with the whole school ... and we can get a really rounded sort of approach’ (13, p. 17). So whether individually or in teaching groups, PD, and, for Jeff referring specifically to material presented at the *Bright Futures* Professional Development (which will be

discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six), new materials and suggestions provide ‘an opening up process’ guiding work to ‘a more flexible model of curriculum that provides for different kinds of styles and different kinds of delivery’ (I, p. 9).

The Assistant Principal considers that if a group of APS teachers participate in PD, one of the benefits to the school is the sense of solidarity created from a feeling of professional identity and a shared “common sense” which allows for effective moderation to occur as

you’ve got a common language [and] it’s a much better thing than a few interested people going off and doing [PD] ...[there is] an expectation in the group that you will apply it together and you’ll help each other to apply it and you’ll talk about what works and what doesn’t work and which children might fit this activity and what we might be doing for the children with that particular planning or whatever, rather than a theoretical, “I’ll get around to it at some stage,” sort of stuff (5, p. 22).

Others view PD in a rather ambivalent or dispassionate way, something to be tolerated as part of a teacher’s work load stating ‘I don’t mind it’ (3 p. 16) or with cynicism seeing PD as ‘a directive from “Head Office”’ which means ‘we must do this, we must embrace this’ (11, p. 8).

Even for teachers in the study who undertake PD with a more positive outlook than their colleagues, the best intentions to change personal teaching styles or include newly encountered innovations can be stymied on return to the classroom. Through experience, Judith is aware that time can slip away and new found knowledge remains languishing in the realm of theory when she reflects ‘how are we then going to work and develop them [new ideas] in our curriculum to bring these things to pass because the days just go and unless you’ve sort of really set it out and thought about it ... we’ve missed the opportunity’ (13, p. 17).

The in situ dilemmas of teacher learning

Michael Fullan (2004) has observed that at any given time, larger systems such as education departments do not know what teachers are doing beyond actively implementing knowledge into practice. But as discussed in Chapter Four, the State expects accountability within its education system and since the devolution of a certain amount of responsibilities to schools, charges principals

and assistant principals with this duty. According to Fullan (2004), ‘sustaining leaders’ (n. p.) possess a deep personal humility coupled with an intense professional will that goes beyond “the self” to create learning communities where both the teachers and the leaders work co-operatively and focus on student learning rather than focussing on the leader. Whilst I am not suggesting that APS functions solely as a benign dictatorship whereby all power is vested in the leader, I sense that the genuinely co-operative aspect of democratic decision making that Fullan advocates (see also Gurr 2004) is not in evidence at APS. Although the Principal acknowledges that ‘not all top-down models work’ (12, p. 13) he clearly puts the onus on his teachers to implement policy, evoking a particularly interventionist management style rather than providing the educational leadership to harness the necessary talents to ensure the effectiveness of top-down policy implementation. The Principal opines that what occurs after PD is reliant on teacher quality and application which is the ‘luck of the draw, because you see we had some teachers on at this school who had enthusiasm and ability to drive that change and that doesn’t happen in every school’ (12, p. 13). He concedes that the ‘principal is fairly important in driving the educational program in the school as well’ (12, p. 13), a sentiment echoed by the finding that principals ‘must establish and maintain credibility and capability with teachers in order to gain their support’ in order for reforms and policies to be implemented (Barnett 2002, p. 48). This situation creates a conundrum if, as Biddle and Saha (2006) observe, most principals, although they view education research favourably, are generalists with a limited knowledge of a wide range of issues, thus being the educational equivalent of a “jack-of-all-trades’. According to Biddle and Saha (2006), principals are only actively interested in research that they consider relevant, therefore the “colonial view” held by the APS Principal that some of his staff are resisters against change and ‘*really* haven’t applied [new ideas] in their classrooms’ (12, p. 15) could be interpreted as merely a difference of opinion regarding the value of mandated policy, for example, in the relevance or otherwise of implementing gifted education programs. But the enactments seen as resistance to change by some of his staff is a paradox, for the Principal simultaneously holds a contradictory neo-conservative belief in the “decline” of the traditional curriculum (see Apple 2005). This is exemplified as he laments the loss of

handwriting skills and the art of chalkboard writing being taught in “teachers’ colleges” saying, ‘[S]o, I’m old fashioned about that aren’t I? [*chuckles*]’ (12, p. 10).

The Principal intimates that not enough professional learning is undertaken by teachers and believes that if PD was mandated, the education department ‘would have greater success with their PD if we perhaps formatted the year differently and [took] a week of the vacation period or whatever ... where all teachers took part throughout the State in PD ... they might show more commitment to it’ (12, p.14). However, most teachers are strongly opposed to undertaking professional development during vacation periods, preferring instead peer-based, “in-house” school sessions conducted by experts and consultants (Milburn 2008; Parliament of Victoria 2008). The Principal acknowledges that ‘we have been applying some pressure about them [teachers] doing some work in their classrooms’ related to PD undertaken during the school year in philosophy and higher order thinking skills (12, p. 15).

Teacher acceptance or rejection of professional development

However, state mandated professional development as related to ministerial guidelines and current education departmental policy is seen by Marjorie ‘to come down from perhaps public servants – people who certainly aren’t in the [class] room, who probably have not a lot of idea what it is like with the blower³⁹ going when you are collecting money and you’re breaking up a fight over there and trying to run a nice program as well. They just say ... “Why don’t we have some new initiative?”’ (p. 8). Yet although others view compulsory PD as ‘partially wasted’ (9, p. 5), or as a necessity because it gives teachers new knowledge (3, p. 16) or ‘a forced insight into something which must broaden your base’ (9, p. 5), participants felt that compulsory PD contributed to teacher expertise. This is illustrated by Jeff who quite passionately felt that “top down” PD is ‘something legitimate’, compelling the

³⁹ “Blower” is the colloquial term used by teachers for the intercom system. The word evolved from the habit of the speaker blowing into the microphone to ascertain if the system was functioning. The Macquarie Dictionary (2001) defines *blower* as ‘a telephone or speaking tube’ (p. 205).

reluctant towards new learning using science, technology and computer literacy as an illustration for:

[T]eachers by and large are not scientific or technological people but the world is controlled by those things and kids need to work in that atmosphere ... teachers don't want to know that much about it really and it's so vital to know ... 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, p. 10).

As Gert Biesta (2007) notes, the managerial agenda of the New Right approach to educational improvement has been criticised for its top-down linearity. For Jeff, this is preferable to schools and teachers being solely responsible for learning and new directions because he feels that not all his colleagues conduct themselves professionally or reflect critically on their teaching:

[i]t doesn't bother me that they're top down initiatives I think that [they are] something legitimate ... we can go back to what we've come from and it was much worse. Teachers will commonly say ... we will do things much better but it's not true ... left to themselves, teachers tend to go home and pack up early or they teach the same old stuff or they teach things which they think are easy for them to teach rather than things which kids need to know (1, p. 10).

Jeff's evaluation of the particular work ethic of some of his colleagues is significant. His personal position related to "top-down" professional development is in variance to those who protest against the value of theoretical professional learning or resist new ideas and/or differing philosophical perspectives citing a lack of relevance or practicality to their immediate teaching situation, particular school community or personal and professional beliefs. This aspect, with a particular focus on the *Bright Futures* gifted policy and associated professional development will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Six.

Professional development discourses: contestation and deliberation or a "serving suggestion"

Writing particularly about evidence-based education, Biesta (2007) argues that the interrelationship of research, policy and practice requires not only expansion but 'continuous democratic contestation and deliberation' (p. 6) as 'an exclusive emphasis on "what works" will simply not work' (p. 6) because success is demonstrated within a specific context. Research is valuable for 'helping educational practitioners to acquire a different understanding of their practice, in helping to see and imagine their practice differently' (Biesta 2007, p. 19) but to be reductive to the point of asking technical questions about "what

works” not only ‘ignores the role of norms and values in educational decision making’ but ‘it also limits the opportunities for educational professionals to exert their judgements about what is educationally desirable in particular situations’ (p. 20). The combined approaches of Biesta (2007) and Schön (1986), plus teacher responses then raise the question, “So why are so many teachers blinkered and antagonistic to research? The time-poor aspect of teachers’ lives might well create the tension between professional development grounded in educational research and theory and professional development couched in the immediacy of a “tips and tricks” approach for classroom implementation.

Schön (1986), observed that teachers found little of practical use within the research offered by cognitive psychologists, and I would argue, from other experts and theoreticians. This is exemplified by the quest from some teachers for “ready-to-serve” classroom activities from professional development rather than ideas that might seed longer term professional thinking and reflection. I have discussed elsewhere how some teachers at APS use a matrix that couples Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theory with Bloom’s (Revised) Taxonomy in a reductive manner with little insight into either theoretical model or how they might best be utilised as a tool for curriculum differentiation (Galitis 2007). Likewise, Vaughn et al. (2003) responding to requests from undergraduates and practising teachers alike to provide more than mere descriptions of curriculum adaptations, presented step-by-step procedures for curriculum implementation in the classroom. A mere aside by the authors relating to the extra responsibilities associated with teaching in mixed-ability classrooms seemed the only explanation for such a behaviourist approach.

Although PD days are perceived by Judith as stimulating, immediacy of action is considered of greater value ‘because the days just go and unless you’ve really set it out and thought about it ... [rather than saying] “Well one day we’ll do that” ... their [the students] seven years have gone ... we’ve missed the opportunity’ (13, p. 17). Whilst Jeff endeavours ‘to find something clear and insightful’ (1, p. 9) during PD sessions, it can also be found lacking as

'often PD tends to be blabby ... and there's much talking about what we ought to be doing ... without kind of saying, "Well, here it is"' (1, p. 9).

Such a sentiment is shared by others whose desire for strategies and activities for immediate classroom implementation appears detached from any consideration of the theoretical or curriculum bases that support government initiatives and education department policies. Eric considers that '[a]ll the PDs that I've found to be the most useful ones are the ones that have been practical ideas that you can take away and then go into the classroom with them and actually use them' (16, p. 12), rather than being required to sit and listen to theory 'for two hours solidly' (16, p. 42). Some teachers do not mask their displeasure at practising such self discipline and Helen observes that

the attitude has been horrible from some participants. They're negative and ghastly ... if someone's up there trying to teach you, you have respect and if you're deathly bored and can't use it, you just sit there and you shut up and you smile every now and then but you don't have to be blatantly rude and horrible. That's really annoying when I see some of my colleagues behaving that way (4, p. 9.1).

An apparent lack of functioning theoretical knowledge surprises the Assistant Principal who found that when interviewing potential staff members 'how few people have ... a sound understanding of government initiatives; even initiatives that they've put in their classrooms. So I think there's a problem with the theoretical knowledge of teachers – not all teachers, but some teachers ... There are other people who have the theory ... but in fact it isn't what they are doing' (5, p. 21). Although Jeff gains 'a sense of opening up' as he critically reflects on his practice during PD sessions, he also touches on teachers' work pressures and the need for something specific for immediate classroom implementation for PD to be of benefit when he says:

[a]ll the time when I go to PDs I think, well, what am I supposed to do? ... [w]hat am I going to that I wasn't doing last week as a result of this PD? And I try to find something clear and specific because often PD tends to be blabby to me and there's much talking about what we ought to be doing or kind of addressing the issue without kind of saying, "Well here it is", you know? And that'll leave you in a hole and you'll go back to school and of course there's 10 000 other things to do you know, and it all gets left (1, p. 9).

Professional development practicalities: falling in or out of control

The school administration expects the staff to implement policies and change according to the current Government policy (APS 2000-2002; APS 2003).

They demand innovation, excellence and best practice (APS web site) but impediments are confronted by teachers during their endeavours. Although teachers may, as a result of PD, desire to provide ‘different things’ (1, p. 24), participants in the study are conscious of various work constraints. The very location of the classroom can impact on the work and behaviour of teachers and students depending whether one is housed in original, new or temporary accommodation. Some work in the limited space of small relocatable classrooms, which, as noted previously restrict Jeff and give him the sense of working ‘in a dogbox ... it’s about two foot square’ (1, p. 24) and with 32 children (2, p. 3) it is challenging ‘not to be constrained by that and [I] try to open up [my teaching]’ (1, p. 24) but

to do the things that I want to do is quite difficult, but the whole school system is designed to, “Sit Down! Be quiet! In your desk! Rule your margin! Get your ten out of ten done! And put your hands on your head!” And despite everything ... that is the most successful you can teach in the physical arrangements that I am now working in (1, p. 24).

Thus the very environment in which Jeff teaches produces physical constraints which neither he, nor his students, can escape as they are coerced into being “docile bodies” governed by the micro-physics of power moderating space and movement as well as learning and teaching styles (Bartky 1988). Also, resourcing processes can become exercises in bureaucracy for Jeff, necessitating forward planning which often stifles spontaneity. ‘The kids will say, “Well, where’s the wire?” And [then] you’ve got to go and get them [sic], you’ve got to go to the office and get forms in triplicate and blah blah blah’ (1, p. 19). Similarly Eric is frustrated when sourcing ‘Science things where you use them once and then you’ve got to go ... down to buy things at the supermarket ... and you’ve got to *drive down* and get all this, so in the end at the end of the day, people just say, “It’s all just too hard” (16, p. 26; participant emphasis). Although, in contrast to Jeff and Eric frustrations garnering supplies, Pam said:

[T]he school’s really well resourced and that surprises me constantly, the level of lack of awareness from members of staff here how well resourced we are and what people in other schools have to deal with ... there’s a disparity between schools ... but there shouldn’t be the degree of complacency ... among some of the staff here and what they just expect to be status quo - is really an extraordinary standard (14, p. 6).

Professional development: the demeanour of the intellect or trite “busyness”

The “busyness” of teachers’ work appears to erode the time available for theoretical reflection after professional development, for, as mentioned, Jeff says ‘you’ll go back to school and of course there’s 10 000 other things to do you know, and it all gets left’ (1, p. 9). This sentiment that is echoed by Louise:

I think that’s another thing with primary teaching is that you can have a million things going on at once, like you’ve got parents coming in about this or that, you’ve got other teachers saying things about different kids or programs, you’ve got the children themselves, I mean you’re often catering in all sorts of roles for all sorts of people, and, it can be very difficult to switch off and suddenly focus after a day at school on a particular area (2, pp. 17-18).

Professional development might well provide valuable personal and professional learning, but it can be challenging, particularly if PD is scheduled after a full teaching day as concentration is difficult due to fatigue as previously noted. Louise thinks that a dedicated curriculum day is ‘probably better because people are more focused, than after ... a long day at school’ (2, p. 17). Helen, whilst acknowledging that PD is something that should be embraced concurs with her colleagues. She said:

I think we’ve really been fortunate in any opportunity to do PD and that we should embrace it, but I must admit I’m getting really quite tired *chuckles* because of the expectations that you should be there, and I really don’t know how people can really run their classrooms efficiently and *properly* get their children where they’re meant to go plus do all of this extensive work that you’re expected to do. So I suspect that’s why people huff and puff’ (4b, pp. 9-10; her emphasis).

Whilst cognisant of the benefits of intellectual stimulation offered in PD programs Marjorie felt that PD

doesn’t seem to have a lot of practical backup offered to teachers to change what they are actually doing in practice in their class. And teachers are always asking for fewer students - p’raps more back up like a teacher aide. Then they could possibly have these kinds of programs if they’re already able to bring down numbers and work in smaller groups of children, if they had a social worker or welfare agents as well, that would all help (11, p. 8).

Others also felt that support for learning difficulties is ‘more of a concern here’ (14, p. 9) and that ancillary staff to assist in preparing materials and equipment would expedite curriculum areas such as Science because ‘the main reason why people don’t do it and probably why they don’t feel confident with it is because there’s so much stuff to get and so much preparation for it’ (16, p. 25).

The “busyness” of the day-to-day work of a teacher can lead to fatigue and a dearth of personal motivation, which impacts upon the enthusiasm and effectiveness of implementing theoretical ideas and policy directives into a lived reality. Louise notes of her colleagues are often so exhausted that ‘when they [new directives and associated PD] come in, initially people say, “Oh, not another thing!” and often they come in with a huge workload to start off with’ (2, p. 16). Helen, the Visual Arts specialist, with an onerous preparation load for her practical domain area, commented on how tired she was feeling but dismissed her fatigue by saying, ‘It’s the end of the year, that’s all’ (4b, p. 17).

In conjunction with such personal experiences, some case study participants also feel exploited, finding, for example ‘ESL teaching three days a week tiring because of the enormous preparation and lack of time release – none!’ (15, 2007, pers. comm. 8 Nov); insecure because ‘if you’ve not been a generalist teacher for the last four years, then you’re not really far at all in terms of security of your work’ (4b, p. 9) and bullied (16, 2003, pers. comm. 14 May) yet continue in their endeavours to meet the high expectations of APS at both a professional and personal level for the benefit of the students in their care by doing PD. This is summed up by Celeste who said PD is necessary ‘because as an educator you owe it to yourself but you also owe it to all the kids in your room to be keeping up with The Joneses’ (7, p. 18).

Professional development: the consciousness of frustration and/or fear

Long term frustration has been experienced by specialist teachers such as Helen, who feel that their particular areas of expertise have been marginalised by Government initiatives and policies so subsequently in ‘the last twelve years, there’s been absolutely no [PD] focus on the Visual Arts’ (4, p. 9). Visual Arts teachers often seek independent PD offered by commercial companies such as art supply distributors⁴⁰ or by attending curriculum specific local teacher support networks (4, p. 9). Yet the level of expertise required for

⁴⁰ For example, “Zart Art” in Melbourne run PD as “hands-on” workshops throughout the year designed to assist teachers in developing their teaching skills in the Visual Arts, as well as assisting in the development of units of work linked to outcomes in the Visual Arts component of the CSF11. The creative outcomes may also be linked to other KLAs such as SOSE, LOTE, English, Science and Technology (www.zartart.com).

workshop participation, especially in the technology, area can be daunting and undermine confidence. Helen felt alienated by such a PD ‘because my skills haven’t been up to a certain level and the person teaching has only bothered to teach the people who have been at a certain level ... [its] been a bit of a turn off for me as a teacher’ (4, p. 9). She also feels uneasy and professionally “put down” when the Principal declares 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, p. 10.2). PD with a particular curriculum focus is of value but ‘not so that the principal embraces it so much and shoves it down everybody’s throat so we have to have it every single day’ (4, p. 10.2). This approach does not reflect the attributes Fullan (2004) suggests a leader must possess to nurture a co-operative, professional learning community. Additionally, the Principal’s views appear in some tension with the overall school ethos of promoting student excellence, linked to high quality teaching, and of meeting the needs of a school community with high expectations. Fostering a positive and encouraging attitude to ongoing professional learning would seem to be an important part of sustaining such a school culture. Yet at the senior management level a sense of ambivalence about the value of in-depth, thought provoking professional development is conveyed with a clear sense that PD must have an immediate practical benefit. This contrasts with the notion that professional development promotes reflection and ultimately enhances practice.

Professional development: insightful self development or lost opportunities

Indicative of their values related to personal learning and development, some of the case-study participants have undertaken professional development as tertiary post-graduate study thus earning formal awards and accreditations. This work is additional to the PD required by the school and is seen as cognitively challenging but personally satisfying. Most courses, but not all, relate either directly or indirectly to teachers’ work. Further studies and courses have been undertaken in Bachelor of Arts (1); [Psychology] (15); Bachelor of Law (16); Graduate Certificate of Education [Science] (14), [Science & Environmental Studies] (10); Graduate Diploma of Educational Administration (12); Master of Education (TESOL) (15); Master of Arts

[Middle Eastern Studies] (15); Media Studies (11); Science (14); Special Education (5; 8) and Philosophy for Children (9; 15).

Marjorie said that, 'I've always studied' (11, p. 9) whilst Ruth explained that her many forays into study was in pursuit of knowledge 'for to be really informed, you can't just do PD' (15, p. 9) even though she 'found them helpful at the time' (15, p. 8) because 'seven weeks is nothing' (15, p. 28). Gaining a certificate qualification, the basic requirement for teaching TESOL in a Government school meant that 'you don't know very much by the time you've finished that. It's a very basic qualification' (15, p. 5) and seeking more knowledge in the field led to Ruth earning a second Master's degree. Pam 'did a post graduate certificate of Science ... at Melbourne [University] which was terrific ... It was ... certainly the best PD I've ever done and it was personally very gratifying to be in an institution like that' (14, p. 3) even though '[I]t was really quite a confrontational process' (14, p. 3). Yet Jeff felt the 'extra three years at uni [was] the biggest mistake of my life. A big mistake of mine, but anyway I was there ... I just did a BA and I've since done other things (1, p. 29). He chose not to elaborate. Even so, it is clear from these accounts that ongoing professional learning is a significant component of teachers' work, even when it is undertaken reluctantly or ambivalently. For some teachers, professional learning programs provided opportunities to extend professional knowledge and enrich practice; for others it also provided the occasion to reflect on, and perhaps modify their personal beliefs; yet for others, as in the case Jeff above, the need for further professional learning was regarded somewhat sceptically, but interestingly, was nevertheless undertaken. Such a mix of views and experiences regarding professional development provides an important backdrop to the account of the Bright Futures professional development program in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a detailed and close-up examination of participants' work and professional knowledge as enacted within Atlas Primary School and the community in which it is located. The school prides itself on fostering excellence. Such a priority charges its teachers to maintain an equivalent

identity which has a bearing upon the actual context for their work and professional knowledge as enacted within the school and the community in which it is located. Although much professional satisfaction is derived by working at Atlas Primary School, the regime of truth produced by the school is not always in accord with the construction of teachers' professional knowledge and personal views and beliefs. In the next chapter, I utilise these aspects as a basis for understanding the *Bright Futures* policy and, in particular, the associated professional development and examine how such a policy enactment informed the work of the case study participants in the context of gifted education and Atlas Primary School's quest for excellence.

Chapter Six

The *Bright Futures* experience

In this chapter I build on the previous discussion of the school professional culture and learning and extend my examination of the views held by the Atlas Primary School (APS) case study participants, looking closely at their responses to, and reflections upon, the *Bright Futures* gifted education professional development program. I analyse these perceptions in terms of participants' conceptual understanding of giftedness and the implications of this for gifted professional development and subsequent classroom practice. A further aim of this chapter is to seek to understand whether familiar teaching practices and personal beliefs related to teaching the "average student" and associated practices of "normalisation" are unsettled and interrupted by professional development and the *Bright Futures* program in particular.

During the period of data collection for the study, Atlas Primary School (2000-2002, p. 1; 2003, p. 2) stated that '[A] program operates for gifted and talented students'. This is the only mention of gifted and talented students within the documentation by the school to parents and the broader community despite the Directorate of School Education (1995b) requirement that '[S]chools will identify how they address the needs of gifted students through their school charter' (p. 9). Specific information regarding the identification of gifted students and how their educational needs will be addressed is not evident in the materials produced by the school. Rather generalised, uncontroversial claims pertaining to the improvement of individual learning, the promotion of excellence and the broadening of extension and thinking activities are offered without supporting evidence in these publications (see Charter⁴¹ 2000-2002, p. 2). There is a marked silence regarding gifted students in both the 2000-2002 and 2003 Charters and related documentation. In 2006, APS stated that it 'offers a broad curriculum that ensures opportunity and successes for all children' promoting 'excellence in learning by providing quality programs'

⁴¹ School Strategic Plans have superseded charter documents. Similar to a school charter, a school's strategic direction spans four rather than three years outlining purpose, values, environmental context as well as goals, targets and key improvement strategies related to students' learning, pathway, transitions, engagement and wellbeing (DEECD 2008d).

(APS website). Again, there is no mention of gifted students. If one follows the lead of the Department of Education and Training (DEST) and accepts Gagné's approach that ten per cent of any population is gifted (AGQTP 2005 Module 1 p. 5), in 2002, APS, with a school population of 580, would have at least 58 students who could be classified as gifted. If APS decided to dispense with the notion of "the gifted child", it has done so quietly, without any formal philosophical statements or policy statements to refute the concept of giftedness embedded within its 'pursuit of excellence' (APS web site). Somewhat paradoxically, this apparent ambivalence and lack of clarity about the education of gifted children exists within an overall school orientation of valuing excellence, as I discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter I detail the *Bright Futures* professional development program. I explore teachers' personal beliefs and professional knowledge and how they make meaning about giftedness in the context of Atlas Primary School. The discussion focuses on one particular student, Michael, who has been identified as "gifted" by the school. Parental views as ascertained by the teachers are woven into the chapter as is the disconnection between officially sanctioned professional development knowledge and teachers' working knowledge of the classroom. Finally I discuss teachers' views of the Challenges and Opportunities program, a withdrawal program originally designed to address the needs of children at both ends of the learning spectrum.

Bright Futures Professional Development Program

The *Bright Futures* Professional Development program (BFPD) was a centralised, "train-the-trainer" approach whereby personnel in leadership positions⁴² were targeted to undertake training as Phase One *Bright Futures* facilitators. All Victorian facilitators met for an initial training day on 20th February 1998 at Moonee Valley in Melbourne and subsequent training was undertaken on a regional basis (Field notes). Once inducted facilitators would return to their regions to conduct the Phase Two professional development in

⁴² Although I was not in a position of responsibility, my application, endorsed by the Principal, listed my Challenges and Opportunities (C&O) position, formal post-graduate gifted qualification and my on-going Master's study with its gifted education focus (Field notes 1997).

their Local Government Area (LGA) to two teachers from each school at a cost of AUD 195 per participant. The BFPD consisted of six sessions (for a duration of 2-2½ hours) covering the topics of: the identification of gifted students; school based programming options; school models – theory to practice; planning a whole school program; classroom strategies and mentoring/tutoring. In turn, the Phase Two teachers would conduct Phase Three BFPD to all staff in their particular schools. To support all stages of facilitation, a *Bright Futures Professional Development Package* was developed by the Department of Education (1998) consisting of a Facilitators' Manual with suggestions for handouts and worksheets, plus two video tapes depicting exemplary school practices, both primary and secondary. According to the Federal Senate inquiry (2001), a strength of Victoria's *Bright Futures* policy was the targeting of personnel in leadership positions (Senate 2001, p. 94) because they would 'make more informed and insightful decisions' (Senate 2001, p. 94) as influential decision makers now trained in gifted education. Such a viewpoint is endorsed by others (see for example, Hargreaves & Fullan 1992; Keast 2003) who suggest that effective leadership is the critical factor in the success or otherwise of teacher professional development and change implementation.

Bright Futures Professional Development at Atlas Primary School

Ten of the case-study participants registered for the *Bright Futures* Professional Development (BFPD) undertaken at APS in 1998 from May to September; Sessions 1, 2 and 3 were conducted on pupil free Curriculum Days and the remaining three sessions were conducted as 3 x 2½ hour sessions after school hours. Six of the participants were not employed at the school in 1998 and of these, four had not participated in the BFPD or any other gifted PD in their previous schools whilst two (both of whom had left and then later returned to APS on contracts) had undertaken the *Bright Sparks* professional development (at Deakin University 2001). The Principal, although registering for each session, did not complete the entire BFPD, attending for short periods over the course duration (Field notes). Of the thirty-five APS teaching staff (including the Principal, the then Assistant Principal and the Integration Aide), twenty three completed the BFPD; five were partial completions and five

completely abstained. An APS staff member at that time, I conducted Sessions 1 and 4-6 of the BBPD in partnership with another Phase One facilitator and Sessions 2 and 3 with an education department *Bright Futures* regional consultant (Field notes 1998).

Each APS teacher, by exhibiting particular behaviours – compliant, ambivalent or resistant - can be understood as functioning within the micro-political mechanisms operating at APS, as enacted through the gifted policy directives, the BFPD and perhaps, PD in general. The non or partial participants in professional development programs could be viewed as embodying resistances, ‘formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised’ (Foucault 1980c, p. 142). 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 Webb et al. 2002; Roth 1992).

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 relatively fluid, 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.

Everyone involved in the BFPD was thus ‘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 1980d, p. 96). In the micro-political climate of APS, the school community, working within the *Curriculum Standards Framework* and the

Bright Futures, is ordered and arranged into a “docile body” produced by the technology of power that is the education department and its administrative and disciplinary processes. Within this inscription of power, I also include both my BFPD facilitator colleague and myself, plus the Eastern Metropolitan Region Curriculum Co-coordinator who assisted with Sessions 2 and 3.

On the pupil free curriculum days (Sessions 1-3), disciplinary observation or surveillance was maintained by marking a roll of attendance and certificates were awarded to attendees on completion of the module. Enactments of self-surveillance by the staff also ensured PD attendance for fear of enduring the principal’s wrath as previously noted by Helen. But teachers’ physical attendance and ostensible completion of the BFPD does not ensure compliance either to PD or to the gifted education policy. Resistance to both can be found in teachers’ behaviours and attitudes. Apart from those at APS who were openly defiant by not attending any of the professional days or sessions, I observed teachers in other schools who wrote letters, read magazines, or even sat with their backs during proceedings (Field notes 1999).

The Principal expressed his gratitude to me in the Staff Notices (APS, 1998) stating that by conducting an ‘in-house’ whole school PD, 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 such an extent that the financial benefit obtained was more important than the immediate and potential future value of the program to the staff, the students, or the school. It also signalled his compliance to a top-down, bureaucratic and technically controlled form of professional development, but his own commitment to gifted education itself remained unclear as seen by his sporadic and brief attendances and failure to engage with the complete BFPD module (Field notes 1998). As others have written (see for example, DEET NT 2006; Nicely, Small & Furman, 1980; Parker, 1993; Thornton, 2000), the leadership role and attitude of the principal is critical for a

school's acceptance or otherwise of gifted education. These researchers suggest that for a school to positively embrace gifted education, the principal must proactively ascertain and then act upon teacher attitudes towards gifted students and programs by encouraging teachers to undertake extensive gifted professional development. The principal must also provide responsible leadership for gifted policy implementation and subsequent changes in teaching and learning to promote the education of the gifted and talented. But to promote such enactments, the principal is obliged to understand gifted pedagogy comprehensively.

It appears that APS held at least a nominal awareness of gifted and talented education prior to the BFPD as evidenced by documents⁴³ which remained buried until the Bright Futures policy was launched. The Principal and the then Assistant Principal did not attempt to determine the attitudes of the staff regarding gifted programs, when 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.⁴⁴ Just which category of student was addressed by either term was not clearly articulated.

The Challenges and Opportunities program

The Challenges and Opportunities program was one of the strategies developed at APS to cater for highly able students as well as for students with learning difficulties. Similar to what is provided in many other primary schools, including those in the private sector (see Walker & Barlow 1990); the C&O program functioned as a withdrawal class. Once a full-time staff position, by 2002, it had been reduced to a half time fraction focussing solely on highly able students. Students in Grades 1-6 were involved for an hour once a fortnight (6, p. 17; 16, p. 10) and Prep students for half an hour a fortnight (13,

⁴³ Although not dated, a careful perusal of the documents leads me to think that these are materials produced by the GCTFSS and/or The Primary Project Team c1981-1984.

⁴⁴ 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. I suspect that I was allocated the role, not because of any recognition of suitable teaching skills, but rather as a result of a DoE directive stating that I only work with small groups due to a significant hearing loss. Initially, C&O 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 (CHIP expo 2003).

p. 15). Participants expressed disquiet with the program sensing that it was neither a well structured enrichment program, nor a satisfactory support arrangement to assist them meet the academic needs of highly able students; particularly if the students were removed from a 'fertile classroom where at least their basic needs have been satisfied' (Wilson 1996, p. 79). Eric said, 'everything's kind of done – not that it is a criticism of her, but it's all done in a bit of a rush ...she's trying to cover the whole school, it's only every second week (16, p. 10). Maria concurs:

Once a fortnight, it's not enough. I don't see it as an effective way of challenging those students. I mean, they could be done inside the classroom. We could be given support on how to do it or what to give these children to extend them but just going out for an hour a fortnight I don't think really is an effective way of challenging those students (6, p. 17).

Perhaps considering the information she gained from several gifted PD programs (Bright Sparks, Flares and *Bright Futures*), regarding the minimal value of pull-out classes for gifted students, (e.g. Sousa 2003), Tamsin said, 'I'm not sure that a withdrawal program is appropriate ... [it should] perhaps [be] incorporated into the classroom program. It's more valid if they can be challenged along the lines of their own area of uniqueness, giftedness, that's actually more like a mentoring [program]' (9, p. 4), but understands the reasons for the APS program '[B]ecause it's considered a requirement for schools' (9, p. 4).

The 2002 C&O teacher had no formal gifted education training so the Principal was buoyed by the prospect of commencing the new school year (2003) with a teacher studying for gifted education credentials. He said of the incumbent, 'I'm quite excited because this new lady coming to take the program is studying for a *Masters* in gifted education' (12, p. 20; his emphasis), but his enthusiasm was tempered by budgetary concerns. He said, 'I've gone a little over budget to make sure that happens. Like I've got a surplus from *this* year, so I'm going to use *this* year's surplus to pay for our new appointee' (12, p. 20; his emphasis).

As Tait (2001) notes, contemporary teachers are well aware of difference in the classroom, and are not only expected to be conversant with multi-abilities and

educational difficulties but with the differences that emanate from personality, learning and/or behavioural conduct. Whilst they observe, identify, organise, and attempt to correct and improve upon perceived deficits or, for the gifted, nurture potential, teachers are, probably unwittingly, producing and reproducing difference (Foucault 1980e; 1984b). When APS created the C&O program, the space had to be filled with bodies recognised as cognitively different from the others in age based classrooms; judged and classified then placed into a program enacted by the discourse of a neo-liberal *Bright Futures* gifted policy as implemented by the school administration. Not all teachers were comfortable with such processes. Pam finds interventions such as the C&O program rather unsettling and appears to associate any initiatives for gifted students with “hot-housing” or “pushy parents” saying:

I believe fully in their entitlement and their right to have that information and that learning made available to them, but not something that's been pushed as an agenda by other forces behind them that are sort of shoving them forward whether they're ready or not and I think it's been bulldozed a bit by parents or data you know, comparing how many kids we got accepted for this; and who's won scholarships at whatever school, I mean the number of businesses out there now, training kids and flogging kids over weekends for six months in preparation for scholarship classes is just appalling as a routine. And as a parent, you wouldn't want your child placed in that situation artificially being a scholarship winner that hasn't got that inherent ability to be able to deliver the goods anyway. I just think people have had a corrupt view of the process sometimes. Yeah, well that's a mix of the package but it you just see so many individuals that are really pressured unfairly and for questionable gain sometimes I reckon (14, p. 26).

Pam's particular standpoint, entrenched within the lock-step, equality of outcomes approach for all students, and reflecting a commitment to the egalitarian social ethic discussed in Chapter Four is evident in the advice she gave to her own children.

My own kids were desperate in the schools that they went to which were high achieving academic grandstanding newspaper headline type ones; they were desperate in Years 7 and 8 to get into the top Maths class and I would say, “Don't go there,” you know, ‘It puts you into a category that's probably going to rush you through a fair bit of the course content’ (14, p. 24).

Her explanation is couched in terms of social justice.

I'm certain along the way that whole system has spilled out a whole lot of other students that should have been with them and I think it's invalid, the whole process, it just doesn't make sense and if they if they finish university maths two years ahead of time, in five years or six years time, so what? You know when it's academically been at some other people's cost. Everyone needs opportunity to be properly interested and properly absorbed in whatever they're doing, but if the focus is too much on these benchmarks and levels, we're setting up a can of worms like we've helped create now (14, p. 25).

Student selection for the Atlas Primary School Challenges and Opportunities program appears to have been done on an ad hoc basis. It was dependent upon teacher identification and supported by unstructured observation as to ‘whether they can afford the time out, whether they’re likely to be co-operative in that team setting type situation, ‘cos the activities are sometimes different to normal class ones’ (14, p. 8). Four of the case-study participants (Jeff p. 12; Louise p. 5; Pam p. 7; Eric p. 10) used student achievement results to assist with initial selection. Marjorie explains:

for the first time in February when I don’t know the children, I tend to go on their results so I see what is showing up in Maths primarily ... I just start off with the benchmark tests and if they’re obviously able ... and the same in English. ... After that I pick people that I can see have a flair as I get to know them better – the second half [year] – I usually pick possibly more personally than the first eight that I that I pick in the first term (11, p. 15).

As the C&O program became part of the APS landscape, past attendance served to eliminate many eligible students for future participation. This was typically explained in the interests of equality of opportunity, again showing a commitment to an egalitarian social ethic. Other factors included a fear of parental retribution or complaints, and gender imbalance within the C&O class. This latter point leads to a contradiction between school practices and teacher perception that there are no gifted girls at APS. Nonetheless teachers were required to nominate girls in the interests of gender balance. (This aspect is more fully explored in Chapter Seven). Judith said of her team of Prep teachers, ‘we tend to let all the Prep children have a turn for the first two terms,’ (13, p. 15) but tempered this by saying ‘one year you might find that there are children ... [who] really do stand out’ (13, p. 15). The conflicting notions of equality of opportunity alongside an overall ethos of cultivating excellence in performance combined with a lack of shared professional understanding regarding both the concepts and practice of gifted education confused Janet:

I was lead to believe it was for the children that excelled in an area ...I'd chosen my children and then they came in and said, “Can the children come for C&O now?” and I said, “Yes,” and they said to me, “Did they have a turn last year?” and they all said, “Yes,” so I had to choose six children that hadn't had a turn so, I got totally confused about that so the first half of the year there were six children that that weren't necessarily talented - I mean gifted - at Maths. They were probably good at it 'cause I chose the next six but weren't the children that I probably would have chosen ... I still don't think they really have deciphered across the school whether everybody should be exposed to it and have a go, or ... if it is the gifted children and it would be the same children all the time, you would assume going out, but if it's just children that

are talented and need different sort of exposure away from the normal classroom to build on that intelligence that they've got, then those children all should have a go, so I'm still a little bit confused, and that's something I'll have to clarify for next year and bring up at a meeting' (10, p. 14).

Some APS teachers, perhaps expecting consistent scores across all subject domains stressed the tasks and work that could *not* be done by their highly able students. Pam challenged assessments on the basis of 'how much of an understanding they've actually got ... [because] there's a great risk of honeycombing their knowledge' (14, p. 13), whilst Louise feels that students test well in one area such as Number 'and yet some of the other Maths areas [Measurement or Chance & Data will] not be showing up as good' (2, p. 7).

Feelings of angst troubled Marjorie during the selection process as she pondered those 'children hovering in the wings' (11, p. 16) adding:

if perhaps you have sent two who have had a previous chance when perhaps the other two may have been worthy of a place and I begin to wonder if that style of teaching of thinking might help to draw in almost half of the rest of the class but we can only pick eight and four in Maths and four in English for the first half so we can only go on the best guide that we've got which is our own feeling about the child from what we've seen and from testing and from past years and testings and reports from previous teachers (11, p. 16).

The struggles experienced by some teachers as they determine the eligibility or otherwise of students for the C&O program are exacerbated by their awareness of parental reaction. Although parental involvement in their children's schooling has positive outcomes (Grolnick et al. 1997; Hill & Craft 2003), tensions can arise when there is a discrepancy between the values and attitudes of parents and teachers (Tarica 2008). Thus, the seemingly simple act of student selection can be made more complex because of concerns related to parental reaction.

Teachers' responses to parental perspectives

According to Marjorie, the C&O program caused consternation for some parents in the school community who had a 'quite strong reaction' (11, p. 16). Comparable responses, particularly parental uncertainty regarding selection processes for gifted education programs, have been well documented (e.g. Sapon-Shevin, 1994). The Principal, when asked about this matter, responded that it is a 'vexed question to answer really as to *who* it [the C&O program]

should be serving' (12, p. 18; his emphasis). He is aware of parental perspectives as expressed in the annual Parent Opinion Survey (12, p. 18) - as are his teachers who often have both to reassure parents and explain the C&O selection process to the students. Helen observed that the C&O has

become just another part of the program where parents ring up and say, "Well my child hasn't been sent to the gifted program yet. Why not?" Out of 360 families, there's surely not every child in every family is gifted but every parent will want to ring up and say, "Well, why hasn't my child been given the opportunity? To be gifted! (4b, p. 7).

Louise elaborated:

Well, there's been a lot of discussion in school as parents get upset if their child's not going [to C&O], and so we try to - if we feel it's justified, change at the half year and send others ... there's a group that go for maths based sessions and a group that go for language based sessions and we've had to say - the criteria is that they come out in the top group of testing as well as being children who will benefit by *giving* something in the sessions ... they're happy to talk and share their thoughts in the session (2, p. 13).

Eric speaking of 'little political type of problems' (16, p. 8) related to selection thinks 'it's a bit of an ego boost for the parents too if their kids get picked for the C&O program because they just like to think that their kids are a bit above everybody else' (16, p. 8). He suspects that some of his colleagues attempt to appease parents.

I've heard other people comment that they pick kids 'cos they're worried about [what] their parents will say if they're not picked - and that's not a wide-spread thing, but that's something that springs to mind a bit. It's not a terribly valid way of picking kids for things like that but I think a bit of that happens as well, particularly if they're aware that parents have kicked up a fuss about that sort of thing in the past (16, p. 10).

He continues:

But at Atlas Primary School, you have to be kind of *conscious* - and I must say I've never had any problems with parents and all that but I know a lot of people have but none the less you are always just kind of just a little bit kind of - not wary, but you're just kind of not wary but you are *aware* of the fact if things aren't seen to be being done in a kind of equitable manner then you're leaving yourself open to hassles with parents. So that's why when you've got to choose four kids for something like 'Challenges and Opportunities' you tend to say, "Well I'm going to have two boys and two girls" because then you can't be accused of kind of bias one way or the other (16, p. 34; his emphasis).

A more pragmatic approach was adopted by Maria.

Well, they [the students] enjoy it but they see it as exciting 'cos you get to go into a special room and do special activities but it does cause a lot of friction with the other children in the room, because [they ask] "Why don't I get to go?" or you'll get parents hassling you [asking] "Why wasn't my child chosen?" and it's seen as a very great honour to be chosen to go to the Challenges and Opportunities room for one hour a

fortnight ... [to the students] I say, "Well eventually you might get a turn sometime. You know we can only have a certain number and you might get chosen to do something else special at school." And with parents, I mean all parents think their children are talented and special and bright and but pretty much [I] just tell them that we have a criteria and the child needs to show excellence in a particular area (6, p. 17).

As APS had no specific policy and practice for choosing C&O students, Maria equated "criteria" for selection with her own judgements and observations of children working, solving problems and explaining their thinking (6, p. 17). Although some (Freeman 2005; Rohrer 1995) believe that primary teachers can recognise intellectual potential or talent, others consider that teachers are poor diagnostic agents for identifying gifted students (see, for example, Endepohis-Ulpe 2008; Gross 1999d; Senate 2001, 1988); arguing that gender bias or a propensity to focus on perceived weaknesses rather than strengths has a bearing on the teacher identification of gifted students (Carnellor 2003; Siegle 2001).

Parental micro-political power appears to moderate other aspects of teachers' work apart from student selection for the C&O program. According to Pam 'one of the teachers in the CSF Level 4 area indicated that they put "commendable" [as an indicator of student achievement] because to do otherwise [i.e. "highly commendable"] would be to invite some grief ... I don't think a parent backlash should make you change but obviously for some teachers it does' (14, pp. 15-16). It seems that some APS teachers opt for the safety of a more conservative judgement rather than invite critical comment of their professional decisions (Edwards 2000).

Challenges and Opportunities: of any value?

The organisational strategy of withdrawing students to attend the C&O program has its merits according to Louise who thinks 'it's probably very good to have those children out for a little while so the next group can have a turn at being the shining lights' (2, p 15). But, taking a more socially-inclusive perspective, Louise also considers that

I don't think it's healthy for them to be in it [C&O] all the time but certainly it's nice sometimes for them to have that experience ... [that] they're not "The One" definitely, I think that you don't want to have just those bright kids together because they need to learn to live in society and they need to learn to cope with all sorts of

people and so they've got to learn that tolerance for others that may not be so bright and sparky like themselves (2, p. 22).

However, overall, teachers were rather ambivalent about the value of the C&O program, particularly 'if the teachers are addressing the children in their grade' (10, p. 15). Pam was adamant that 'support's more of a concern here I think than that [C&O] (14 p. 9), although she conceded 'it [the C&O program] suits some more than others. Some students get a lot more from it than others as well' (14, p. 9). Ruth noted that 'there was certainly a bit of the "Thinking Hats" (de Bono 1992) that went on but a lot of it was stuff that I used to do in the classroom like nets, and tangrams and autobiographies and diaries and ordinary sort of work. I didn't see how that related to gifted education at all' (15, p. 24). Thus, by 2002, the C&O program was seen as having been reduced to merely repeating themes and strategies already used by teachers within their mixed ability classrooms. The case-study participants felt that there was little or no evidence of the C&O program advancing learning rates or engaging students in problem solving/finding or allowing for student-selected content according to interest. Comments from Pam, Melanie, Marjorie and Maria indicate the need for a specially trained gifted education specialist within the school, but as a support for learning and teaching within the regular mixed ability classroom rather than as a provider of withdrawal classes or pullout programs (see Moltzen 1998). Janet expanded this perspective but also alluded to teacher "busyness":

cos I think there's only a small number of children being exposed to it, and it's only literacy and numeracy and I think if you're catering for the broader span in your classroom ... accounting for individual differences, you really should be exposing those top children to those sorts of act open-ended activities that they're doing ... I mean they're doing things like the "Six Thinking Hats" and a bit of philosophy and all that which I do in my classroom anyway ... I would prefer, this is me to see them [the C&O teacher] coming in to the classroom and work alongside the classroom teacher because in those open-ended tasks you've got children just bubbling and wanting to discuss and talk and share and if you could make the groups like, in half and then at least you could have some teacher guidance to allow them to share what they're doing and have another teacher in there, and um, yeah, but I think in the classroom would be really beneficial and, depending on what you were doing, but 'specially in the technology and science activities where it's setting up and hands-on and lots of work going on (10, p. 17).

This "teacher busyness" sentiment was echoed by Marjorie, who also desired expert support either directly in the classroom or for peer observation rather than a student withdrawal program:

I'd like to see a lot more of it integrated into the whole classrooms so that we had either that [C&O] teacher visiting to do a quick burst say a twenty minute burst on

how we can approach the current subject – say “Antarctica” looking at it with some of the techniques that I use at my C&O class. So have it much more integrated but until we’ve got more teachers or more opportunity to bring in extra things like I said before, we need a lot – a lot more assistance in classes instead of just one teacher and the thirty children but if in the future we could have more, I think these people with another way of approaching a topic would be marvellous to actually visit (11, p. 17).

But for Marjorie to experience such desired practices requires a school that has ‘productive norms of collegiality and experimentation’ where ‘teachers talked frequently and specifically about classroom practice, observed one another teach, collaborated in instructional planning and preparation, and willingly advised and taught one another’ (Little 2007, p. 224). Such a culture of professional collaboration did not emerge strongly in the interviews with teachers. Although APS teachers were released for one day per term on designated Curriculum Planning Days and value this time to work together (13, p. 17) it comes at the cost of their planning and preparation time. Apart from two Prep teachers working in an open-classroom, which is seen by Melanie, one of the Prep teachers, as ‘beneficial’ because ‘[H]aving someone to bounce ideas off and having someone to tear your hair out is really, really good’ (3, p. 2), each APS teacher worked in the traditional, cellular manner of one teacher with about thirty students, an approach that isolates teachers from each other for most of the working day, thereby fostering structural isolation and an environment of individualism (Little 2007).

Despite the mixed feelings among the staff about the value of the C&O program, it is a highly visible marker to the community that APS is addressing the needs of gifted students, even if the value derived appears minimal. The Assistant Principal observes that there is

a perception in the school community amongst *parents* that their children should go to these programs ... We did find one child a couple of years ago who went off to - a girl - who went off to do an assessment for a gifted program somewhere else and came out as highly able and had never demonstrated that in this school population at all. We then immediately sent her off to C&O, so we can take direction. We can have things pointed out to us, but no teacher that had had this child had ever - and good teachers - had ever seen it, nor had the child probably ever shown it (5, p.26; her emphasis).

Whilst speaking of grade acceleration and not directly about the C&O program, the Assistant Principal suggests that the classroom is first and

foremost where individual learning needs must be addressed, also intimating that the C&O program might be of limited value:

Well, first of all you've got to identify that the child's needs are not met within the classroom. We've got a lot of children that are bright or very able that are being extended perfectly well in the classroom and have "like minds" in the classroom. You might even have a whole group that are very bright so that's appropriate if that's happening there, socially, with their own social mix of children; they're getting the stimulus, they're not being held back, they're not doing "busy work" - all that sort of stuff (5, p. 10).

Despite the then new State policy on the education for gifted children in 1995, the APS decision to implement the Challenges and Opportunities program 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. In this way, APS can be seen as maintaining its egalitarian credentials while seeking to promote excellence and to cultivate some forms of talented performance and elite achievement.

I shall now further elaborate upon what the *Bright Futures* policy for the education of gifted children and the associated professional development meant for the teachers themselves, their understandings of the gifted child and ultimately, their own classroom practice.

Personal beliefs and professional knowledge

Teachers' working knowledge is not just rational professional knowledge. Andy Hargreaves writes that '[I]t is what teachers think, what teachers believe and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning young people get' (in Hargreaves & Fullan 1992, p. ix). The power of teachers' personal beliefs is evident when beliefs are exercised, within and against the normative judgements which are deeply ingrained into teachers' professional work behaviours. Teachers' work involves much time spent on the continual (formal and informal) assessment of individual learning, cognition and behaviour against normal distributions of achievement for age or stage related criteria indicating what ought or should be done according to particular contexts (see, for example, Fendler & Muzaffar 2008; Gordon 1980; Hatton & Elliot 1994; Schön 1986). Reflecting on his work, Jeff said, 'I

certainly think that teachers have expectations of how a kid is going to perform' (1, p. 7).

Hatton and Elliot (1994), state that normative claims associated with education 'often appeal to the idea of social justice, that is, justice as it pertains to social institutions, organisations and structures' (p. 71). In this usage, normative claims pertain more to questions of social ethics and to the values to which schools and students should aspire. I am employing normative in a slightly different way here, emphasising its "normalising" connotations. Social institutions, such as schools, are also sites of governmentality that enact processes of regulation and conformity to achieve normalisation (Foucault 1980b). There are competing accounts for all social constructs (Hatton & Elliot 1994), and I suggest none more so, than the notion of giftedness within a framework of social justice. Endeavouring to reconcile these two constructs causes tensions for teachers. For example, the Assistant Principal (AP) holds reservations about secondary Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) schools, which are designed to cater for gifted students. Although acknowledging that no cohort of students is homogeneous, even if it is selected on the basis of academic prowess, the AP's concerns lie not within the cognitive but the affective domain. She suspects that perhaps for the first time, gifted students, now so identified, and coming from age-grade grouping practices might learn that there are others who are academically brighter. She said:

I have mixed feelings about that [SEAL] 'cause I've got friends who have gifted kids who've gone on to do a University High course and what-have-you and they've been very successful academically but I think they've missed out – they felt they've missed out on some of the social and "being kids things" ... They're all bright. They're all very able but there will be kids there at the top of that pile and kids there at the bottom, and I'm not sure what that does to the self esteem of the bright kids, but the ones that are not as bright as the ones above them because teenage adolescents' self esteem is all bound up in how you see yourself in the group (5, pp. 11-12).

The Assistant Principal's belief is contrary to what many researchers have found (see, for example, Feldhusen 2003; Gross 1997; Kulik 2003; Rimm 2002) which is that the best way to support high aptitude (gifted) students, particularly adolescents, is by grouping them according to ability. According to these researchers, groupings and supportive learning environments that value

high achievement without fear of ridicule or put-downs from the “cool-to-be-a-fool” element serve to shield gifted students, many of whom have heightened sensitivities related to their academic ability and personal understandings of being “different” (Clark 2008; Davis & Rimm 2004; Gross 2004; Landvogt 1991; Sword 2007). Indeed Feldhusen (2003), says these students ‘*need* accelerated, enriched, fast-paced, challenging instruction to sustain their talent development’ (p. 229; his emphasis). Gross (2004), researching self-esteem shifts in both selective and comprehensive (mixed-ability) NSW secondary schools, found that the selective school students showed a high self-esteem derived from a motivational orientation linked with task-involvement (the pursuit of learning as motivation) rather than ego-involvement (competing with fellow students), an orientation contradictory to the common perception that selective schools breed competitiveness. Like Kulik (2003), Gross (2004), acknowledges that students on first entering an ability grouped cohort might experience a ‘dip in academic self-esteem’ (p. 157) but soon

shift to a more realistic perception of their own abilities when they are able (often for the first time) to compare themselves with other academically gifted students ... it may be gifted students who are retained in the mixed-ability classroom who have inflated opinions of their own abilities, as they have little opportunity to measure themselves against a valid comparison group (Gross 2004, p. 157).

Accusations of elitism have been made against homogenous groupings but researchers (see, for example, Feldhusen 2003; Gross 2004; Kulik 2003) have shown that gifted students benefit both cognitively and affectively when working within advanced and accelerated groupings. There are minimal effects (positive or negative) on the self esteem and achievement of average or below-average students with slower students showing a slight rise in self-esteem. Gross (1997) suggests that any decline in academic self esteem experienced by some students is ‘a function of the change from primary to secondary school, rather than a function of the type of school entered’ (p. 28) and she found that selective high school students in fulltime ability groupings and accelerated programs did not experience a drop in academic self esteem.

Although such research is readily available to educational professionals, the sway of personal belief is a powerful form of resistance. In the Assistant Principal’s case, the social justice argument of being with “like minds”

advanced by the gifted research does not dislodge her beliefs about the emotional risks of selective grouping. This perspective aligns with the “big-fish-little pond-effect” as coined by Herbert Marsh (2005; 1987) who observed that although cohorts of high-ability students outperform average-ability cohorts, the corollary of homogeneous high-ability grouping is a negative effect on self-concept.

Personal beliefs about the “gifted child and professional and professional development

As examined previously in Chapters Two and Four, the regime of giftedness and gifted education was nascent within the same period as intelligence theorising and found a niche within the developing field of psychology. To maintain its status as an entity, in part the construct of giftedness and gifted education needs to be nurtured within schools by teachers who believe in its merits, feel that the concept is “real”, and that not only is giftedness manifest within a particular group of children but that any potential shown by such children should be nurtured. As Fleur states, gifted children ‘don’t exist if you don’t look for them’ (8, p. 8). Proponents of gifted education continue to argue that for the gifted field to develop, sufficient and appropriate attention must be given in both undergraduate teaching degrees and in postgraduate professional development programs to addressing the needs and identification of gifted children (see, for example, Gross 2004; Senate 2001, 1988). This sentiment is echoed by Louise who says

maybe there needs to be more training, more courses for people to cater, I mean we’re always doing courses for the children at the lower end of the scale and that maybe there needs to be more offered. I mean the more teachers do the more sensitive and aware they are of children at the top end of the scale, the better they’ll be handled, and able to flourish in the system. Some of them don’t’ (2, p. 8).

For the majority of the APS case-study participants, their first formal encounter with gifted theory was not as undergraduate students but as experienced teachers undertaking the *Bright Futures* professional development program.⁴⁵ Although acknowledging the benefit of the BFPD, the Assistant

⁴⁵ The BFPD was the first gifted PD for ten of the case-study participants; two participants completed the Bright Sparks PD (Deakin University 2001) but not BFPD; two completed both the BFPD and Bright Sparks and four participants (including the educational psychologist) had not completed any gifted professional development.

Principal intimated that she had come to understand gifted students not through the technical control of the BFPD, but rather '[B]ecause I am older and wiser and more experienced ... I think I had an innate ability to identify kids that had difference, that could do particularly clever things, particular talents' (5, p. 5). Similarly, Tamsin believed that 'for different types of giftedness ... older teachers can get it' (9, p. 4), because of not only their teaching experience 'but to be aware is really important' (9, p. 4). But according to Tamsin, such awareness can only come from professional development as offered by '*Bright Futures*, Bright Sparks and gifted twilight meetings and things' (9, p. 4). The Principal opined '[S]ome of the younger teachers I don't think have been well prepared in this area at all, whereas some of the more experienced teachers are well aware and certainly identify those children and do cater for their needs' (12, p. 16). Such beliefs as held by the Principal, the Assistant Principal and Tamsin echo claims that experienced teachers become expert despite limited gifted training (see Hanninen 1988, 1985; Lewis & Milton 2005). This is contrary to views held by Tomlinson et al. (1997), who argue that teachers do not evolve into experts of the gifted or gifted education by the sheer dint of experience. An "extended professional" rather than a "restricted professional" is required; one who is actively engaged in gifted theory and able to apply transfer theoretical principles to practice to benefit student learning (Armstrong 1984). For the Assistant Principal, giftedness is aligned with demonstrated ability but she did not elaborate how one might identify those underachieving or masking potential.

Although teachers' voices might be muted within their subordinate role under bureaucratic and administrative policy enactments (McDonald 1986) such as the *Bright Futures* program, it is evident that teachers' beliefs, attitudes and classroom practices are strongly affected by their own family and life experiences (Kagan 1992). This is the case it seems, whether or not they have children of their own (Schools Council 1990). Pam said

every parent wants the best for their child, I mean I teach differently to probably how I did prior to having my own children ... it's different sitting on one side of the table to the other and as a parent you can be very frustrated by hearing the school administration needs and requirements when you know your child's needs and requirements aren't necessarily going to match in that school sense (14, p. 15).

The “school sense” of which Pam speaks might mean that teachers with highly able children considered “gifted” would tend to be sensitised to giftedness and therefore look more favourably upon other children categorised as gifted; this in turn, would have a significant impact upon classroom practices. For example, the Assistant Principal believes her own boys are ‘very bright but they’re not gifted’ (5 p. 19) which might have a bearing on her attitudes related to SEAL schools. Speaking of the *Bright Futures* professional development but linking it to her own experience, Louise said:

I think with Bright Futures [PD] anything like that for gifted children is good if it makes teachers more aware of those sort of children because I think with my own child, I’ve seen teachers threatened by those children. I mean even in secondary school I can see teachers who can’t handle kids like that and so anything that will make teachers just more sensitive I suppose, more aware, and to make them realise that it’s okay for kids to know more than them in a particular area and maybe some clues on how to handle them, I think that’s good (2 p. 17).

Thus, it could be assumed that Louise would have little or no objection to provisions, special or otherwise, for intellectually gifted students and for further professional development to enhance teachers’ understanding of gifted and talented students.

Teachers’ perceptions after Bright Futures

The label: gifted and/or talented

As discussed in Chapter Two, the problematic nature of language in the field of gifted education has triggered ongoing positioning and theorising. Freeman (2001) cautions that the word “gifted” must be judiciously applied but uses it ‘simply because it is easier than all the circumlocutions’ (p. vii). Ruth Cigman (2006) also taking a utilitarian approach states that ‘[G]iftedness will do as well as any other’ (p. 199). Some researchers in the field of gifted education have voiced their concerns, contesting both the category of giftedness itself and the terminology employed to describe academically precocious students. As previously discussed in this thesis, in everyday usage the words “gifted” and “talented” are recognised as social constructs by some gifted education researchers as they endeavour to make meaning of and encapsulate what is understood by giftedness and/or challenge the validity of the field of gifted education (Borland 1997, 2003b, 2005; Freeman 2005; Sapon-Shevin 1996, 1994). Examining American educational practices, Borland (2003b) argues

paradoxically for “gifted education” without gifted children, suggesting that it is more appropriate to a focus on the teaching required to address diverse abilities. Parallel with Borland’s approach, Slavin (1990), argues for more cooperative learning and a reduction in student tracking with separate programs for the gifted, whilst Feldhusen (2003) would prefer to abandon the gifted concept and label as he deems it a ‘hasty designation’ (2001, p. 25). Pondering the effect of the term “gifted” on the majority of “ungifted” (1998), he plumps for descriptors from the language of special education (special abilities, talents, needs and the like), and calls for accelerated and fast-paced learning programs where appropriate.

It appears that over all, the APS teachers who participated in the case-study would concur with the sentiments expressed for relinquishing labels because of the inherent confusion the terms provoke. But admirable as this sentiment might be, the labels are not easy to replace, and as seen in Chapter Two, academic debates continue regarding solutions to the quandary. As Louise said, ‘it’s a matter of definition and who’s to say [their] definition is right really?’ (2, p. 8). The Assistant Principal alluded to the difficulties within the school community regarding a shared understanding of terminology and subsequently justifying the selection of students for the C&O program:

I think there are parents who *think* their children are gifted and maybe I might not agree, so I think that’s a problem. I think it’s a bit like hyperactive children and all those sort of terms that are bandied around so I think that’s a problem that we don’t have a good definition and we have – it’s like dyslexia, we have a whole lot of ideas of what that means and who has it and whether you can catch it or that sort of stuff so I think that’s a problem (5, pp. 13-14; her emphasis).

Rather than drawing on any specific theoretical perspectives, including those proffered by the BFPD, the majority of case study participants generally used everyday conversational language and lay expressions to convey their personal understandings of the terminology. They attempted to convey their particular comprehension of the words “gifted” and “talented” by alluding to theory but sometimes confused constructs and did not elaborate on language that had become internalised as “eduspeak”. For example: using your brain (3; 4; 6; 10) creativity, (1; 3; 6); exceptionality (13); intelligence, (10); academically intelligent (9); creatively intelligent (9); emotional intelligence (9); Multiple Intelligences (1; 11); social intelligence (8); learning styles (9); problem

solving (3; 6). This perhaps indicates some awareness and superficial understanding gleaned from professional development without any significant depth of knowledge.

One strong influence has been the Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory of Gardner (1993, c1983) which has been enthusiastically adopted by educators world wide, including those in Australia (McGrath & Noble 2005, 1995; Pohl 2000; Vialle & Perry, 2002). One of the participants, Ruth, makes a link between MI and giftedness, reflecting that ‘there’s probably *nine* areas of giftedness, like, you know, bodily movement, ballet and all that sort of thing, you can be gifted in that or the arts, it’s not just in the academic field’ (15, p. 7; my emphasis). Tamsin spoke of ‘Gardner’s eight learning *styles* or the emotional and the creative talents or giftedness’ (9, p. 2; my emphasis) and Jeff felt that ‘I’ve also *done* Multiple Intelligences for reading’ (1, p. 2; my emphasis) as if MI is to be addressed and then checked off an activity list. In 2003, Gardner noting such muddles said:

by the middle 1990s, I had noticed a number of misinterpretations of the theory – for example, the confusion of intelligences with learning styles and the confounding of a human intelligence with a societal domain (e.g. musical intelligence being equated with mastery of a certain musical genre or role (p. 8) ... so far I am sticking to my 8½ intelligences (p. 10).

Gardner has also emphasised that MI theory is not an educational prescription nor does it incorporate a position on tracking or gifted education (1999, p. 89). He regards ‘MI theory as a ringing endorsement of three key propositions: We are not all the same; we do not all have the same kinds of minds (that is, we are not all distinct points on a single bell curve); and education works most effectively if these differences are taken into account rather than being denied or ignored’ (1999, p. 91).

Some teachers associated the gifted as those who demonstrated an above grade average or exceptional competence in one area (Janet) or a range of domains (Louise; Melanie; The Principal) or more generally ‘beyond being just an able student’ (Judith p. 5). They linked talent with a particular area, often associated with the arts such as music and painting (Louise; Melanie; Maria). Eric sees talent as ‘a kind of aptitude that people have ... It is not the same as gifted ...

because gifted ... is kind of describing a higher level of talent (16, p. 14). In a similar manner, Judith viewed talent as having 'abilities above the average' (13, p. 8) but gifted is 'really exceptionally above what even the very top of the talented group would be' (13, p. 9). For Maria "the gift" is domain specific but revealed 'in all areas of that particular thing that they're gifted in' (6, p. 4) yet she also said that 'to be 'talented is something like you're talented in one specific area' (6, p. 4). Not satisfied with her definition, she confessed that 'I get really confused with gifted and talented' (6, p. 4). Like Maria, other teachers admitted to being confused by the terms gifted and talented (Louise; Melanie). Melanie said, 'I hate the word [gifted] because gifted and talented to me are confused' (3, p. 7); or as Janet found, they are 'really hard to define' (10, p. 2).

Others viewed giftedness as innate (Melanie; Assistant Principal; Janet). For Melanie, the difference between the terms is that 'a talent can be taught' so 'all children are talented' (3, p. 7). Janet agrees 'that everyone has a talent' (10, p. 3) but it is only revealed by hard work (10, p. 6) or 'some sort of exposure' (10, p. 3); a sentiment echoed by Marjorie who feels that talent can be equated 'with something taught, with skill development' (11, p. 21). The Assistant Principal also viewed gifted children as having an innate ability which can be measured (5, p. 8) and who 'did very much better than was normally expected' (5, p. 6). For her, the terms gifted and talented are conjoined and it is giftedness that can be enhanced because

gifted to me is somebody that has a special "add on" that you're not finding in the normal range and you would have in your normal range bright children, highly able children but to be gifted at something is quite different. It's a different intrinsic innate understanding they have about whatever it is they're very good at; it's not a learnt thing. It can be added to by learning (p. 7).

Without offering any differentiation, Pam proclaimed, 'I mean they just always tag now together "gifted and talented"' (14, p. 13). The Principal used the word talent to define giftedness as 'exceptional talent in one or many domains' (12, p. 8) and then said 'I'm equating them rather than seeing a distinction between a gifted and a talent' (12, p. 9). Others also view the terms as transposable: for Ruth, '[T]alent and gifted are ... fairly much on a par' (15, p. 6) but 'being gifted is an extra talent above the ordinary' (15, p. 6); Tamsin

thinks ‘gifted [and talented] are synonymous because I think they’re just labels’ (9, p. 7). Celeste states they are ‘very similar interchangeable terms although I think gifted is just getting back a little bit further ... using far greater skills’ (7, p. 6); and although talent appears to her a rather an amorphous entity, because it ‘could be just an offset ... outside the square of spatial awareness, or a bit of directionality or something’ (7, p. 7) it is all-encompassing as ‘talent is a very huge umbrella ... and the skills enable you to use the talent (7, p. 7).

Rather than pondering the meaning of the categories Jeff categorically dismissed the entire notion of definitions and related academic debate, echoing Borland (2003b) and Sapon-Shevin (1996, 1994) and saw teaching about addressing individual learning needs. He said:

the whole discussion about gifted and who’s a gifted person bogs that down and what I needed was this kind of freeing structure which doesn’t bother about labelling people (1, p. 8) ... I don’t [concern] myself with terms – it doesn’t help me to go around saying that, “This is talented and that’s not” ... I don’t see it as a function of mine to label people as “You’re gifted and you’re not”. I create a structure whereby if you’ve got sparky ideas or you want to be a bit interesting and left field one day or because you are in a good mood ... you can do that. It’s quite legitimised within the structure (1, p. 23).

Thus the participants at APS reflect what is evident in the research literature; that a consensus regarding the definition, nature and difference of the terms gifted and talented remains elusive. And, as I have argued in earlier chapters, the field of intelligence testing and classification has long been dominated by what I characterise as “definitional struggles”, and we can see versions of these struggles being played out among participants and in the naming and characterisation of the “gifted” child.

Labelling children

Similarly to Jeff, Fleur, the educational psychologist associated with Atlas Primary School said ‘I haven’t really pondered much on the difference between gifted and talented’ (p. 11) as her work has been focused ‘very much on students at the lower end of the ability range’ (8, p. 2). Perhaps anticipating the discussion agenda, she pre-empted my opening gambits by saying, ‘I haven’t done *Bright Futures* by the way. I don’t know what’s in it’ (8, p. 6).

Considering that the gifted construct is situated within the psychological domain, this is a somewhat surprising situation, given that the very practitioners, employed by the education department and accredited to perform intelligence tests were not involved in either BFPD, or perhaps even in the development of the program itself. Yet, education department psychologists are required to attend to behavioural issues, the resolution of which might well be assisted by a better understanding of underachievement, asynchrony or gender issues as they relate to gifted children. Looking back, it might have been useful to ensure involvement of all DoE educational psychologists with the BFPD to enlighten them of gifted policy directions and thus provide a shared basis of understanding with teachers.

Fleur said that '[O]nly quite recently have schools and parents been asking me if I would assist students because they're gifted or talented or bright or suspected to be and usually because there's a behaviour problem associated with it' (8, p. 2). Without elaborating her reasons, she stated her preference for the WISC (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children) to determine IQ as she is 'very sceptical about people who use things like the old Stanford-Binet and then say they get a valid IQ from it' (p. 9). Fleur remarked that 'I personally don't label kids as gifted, so if I'm describing a child that I think is particularly capable, that's what I say' (8, p. 11). The 'gifted tag comes with a lot of sort of emotional connotations, so I say "very capable students" or "capable in particular areas"' (8, p. 11). For Fleur, the term talent suggests being 'slightly less capable than gifted and then maybe slightly narrower, so it might be a particular talent in something like origami, but not to the same extent, so a narrower sort of skill, a more particular skill' (8, p. 11). Tamsin also says 'we shouldn't label them. Most definitely' (9, p. 3), because children are 'changing all the time' (9, p. 3) a sentiment shared by Judith who says that

Once 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 that there's no flexibility, and children do change from one year to the next and that's why I think you need to know a little bit about the background at home and what they're going through (13, p. 21).

Creativity

Many learning theorists have suggested that creativity is a form of giftedness, an important component or trait of giftedness or even as synonymous with giftedness (see, for example, Clark 2008; Davis & Rimm 2004; Piirto 1992; Renzulli & Reis 2003; Runco 1993; Winner 1996). Creativity has been incorporated by some teachers into their understanding of the terms gifted and/or talented, despite definitional variations and differing connotations of “creativity” (Wilson 1996). Taking a cognitive processing perspective, Helen feels that creativity is ‘being able to take the information you gather as an intelligent person and to process it ... to express a fact ... collecting facts and then processing them in terms of an emotional response’ (4, p. 5b). For Pam, it applies to:

students that are offering routinely something above and beyond expectation and they have creative flair with whatever that expertise is and have a fair bit of input into what they do with the content. And those students that have got the mastery of the concept that they’re able to determine a fair bit of it themselves are those student that I would put in that that category [of gifted] (14, p. 12).

Eric suggests that creativity is ‘a kind of subset of talent’ (16, p. 15) and to be creative one needs to be original rather than ‘recreate other things people have done’ (16, p. 15); others associate creativity with being ‘so artistic’ (15, p. 11).

Judith recognises the importance of the teacher to nurture and make manifest any creative potential but does not equate either the process or the student, with giftedness, saying ‘you really need to extend them and give them lots of open-ended opportunities. Lots of creative ways of expressing their talent but ... it [is] hard to sort of really put them in the gifted category’ (13, pp. 8-9). Similarly, Jeff, by using a matrix of activities combining Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences and Bloom’s Taxonomy of Thinking observed his students making self-discoveries and problem solving in novel ways but he does not view students who display such behaviours as either gifted or talented. He was

really pleased because I’d allowed and opened up in my program a situation that where the kids could be creative in a way that I would never have planned or never expected or what the traditional curriculum would never have allowed and so I was really happy with [it] and whether it is talented or not I mean I don’t really care, you know (1, p. 23).

Marjorie feels that ‘[A] gifted child is more able to take what they’ve been taught and then create something beyond that (11, p. 20). Structuring a more

formal and traditional classroom than her colleague Jeff, Marjorie notes that creative children have differing priorities and are eager to complete set, standard classroom work to focus on areas in which she permits greater freedom of expression. She observes that these students work

as fast as they can go so that they can get back on to what the really important bits are, like colouring in their project and getting things going nicely for their presentation or for their speech or for their little play and dance that they're preparing – it's like get rid of that, get it done for her, put it in the tray for correction, know that that's out of the way so that they can get on and - with other things and I think that's how I notice them in class – a little bit sloppy sometimes; let's get it over with you know; perhaps a few little errors but not because they were particularly unable to do it but because they just rushed at it got it through and that was that (11, p. 19).

Even though she observes the lure and effects of embellishments as a strong motivational force to complete basic work, Marjorie views “the basics” as sacrosanct and rather than incorporating what her students find so motivating into an adjusted course, she persists with what must be assessed. In such pedagogical approaches, as Braggett (1994b) notes, the ‘[E]mphasis is on the *teaching* rather than on *children's learning*. This is a wrong assumption’ (p. 12; emphasis in original).

Tamsin, another traditionalist teacher, assesses herself as ‘[A]n interventionist teacher who likes control but aims for excellence in all areas of work and particularly creatively too. I mean I like to see children thinking and working creatively’ (9, p. 20). She sees that

[C]reativity is *more* than just pretty and decorative. It's this deeper thinking and coming up with ideas that are challenging, that will not be ordinary, that will be something that will make other people see things in a new light, that will make people say, "Ooh, well that's interesting!" and “I would never have thought of that!” It might be in language, it might be in oral or written language, or it might be in artwork but it's a different perspective, and seeing things from a different perspective’ (9, p. 2).

For Tamsin, traditional academic giftedness is readily recognised but creativity and emotional intelligence are ‘things that we tend to overlook because you can see children that are gifted traditionally but the ones that see the bigger picture we can easily miss’ (9, p. 3). Maria, although uncertain how to express herself, suggests that being creative is

in the sense of making, not just your stock standard type of [response] if you're given something to do and the child presents it in just their stock standard way - it's a bit different. It's coming up with a different way of presenting it or making something that's different to the way other children make it. Creative is using different talents to make it ... it's not just in the constructing sense of being creative. You can be creative

in the way you write I suppose, you can be creative in music and in drama, I mean in all areas. Does that sort of define what I think creativity is? (6, p. 14).

A more reserved approach to seeing creativity as linked with giftedness is taken by Louise. For her, creativity is apparent when students ‘come up with their own ideas and [it is] probably a recognition of where, maybe their interest and ability lies at that time - it doesn’t necessarily mean that’s it! They’re a poet or that’s their thing but they might just have a particular interest in having a go at that sort of thing’ (2, p. 20).

Contrary to what most of the case-study participants expressed, Fleur, the educational psychologist, incorporating her observations of not only APS but that of other schools in her circuit, feels that ‘the creative student and the one who thinks laterally and so on, I think, still isn’t valued [by teachers] as we would hope’ (8, p. 6). Melanie was the only participant to concur with this sentiment stating that ‘it’s the academic that gets the bigger push than the “think differently” side and you’ve got to balance the time, it’s usually, the academic push that wins out and it’s the “think differently” side of things that you don’t fit in’ (3, p. 7).

Thus, whilst the teachers at Atlas Primary School did not share a common or single understanding of the relationship between creativity and giftedness, they all acknowledged that there was some kind of link and that this added to the challenges facing the teaching of gifted children. Such views also informed, implicitly or explicitly, their working knowledge of the characteristics and learning modes of the gifted child.

Teacher expectations/observations of the gifted

Eric described gifted students as those ‘who could grasp new ideas quickly and then apply them without sort of repeated explanations and also tend to be independent workers (16 p. 7) and ‘have more sophisticated interests’ (16, p. 37). His colleague, Jeff, looks for something “sparky” in his students within ‘their own creativity particularly and their ability to take control of their own learning processes ... but only within a structure, we need structure’ (1, p. 25).

As mentioned above, having children of one's own might serve to temper teachers' attitudes and classroom practices. For Louise, having a child considered gifted has added an extra personal dimension to the textbook listings of characteristics and behaviours associated with giftedness. This personal awareness assists in her evaluations of the extent of capabilities; she said:

[h]aving my own gifted child ... has made me more aware, and I maybe look at children a bit more who may show those characteristics and ... [I] look at their ... personalities and what they are doing a little bit more and maybe try to push them just to see what they can do, if they've got it there (2, p. 10).

It also means that educational provisions or interventions such as SEAL schools and acceleration are likely not to be opposed. For example, Janet has 'a daughter that was accelerated from [Year] Five to Year Seven into T High [school] into the accelerated gifted program and she has just won a scholarship to the College of the Arts' (10, p. 5).

All kids are gifted and/or talented

The Senate Report (2001) rather bluntly states, '[A]ll children cannot be of outstanding ability relative to age peers any more than all children can be of outstanding height' (2.52, p. 22). This accords with the views held by many researchers in the field (see, for example, Feldhusen 2003; Ford 2000; Sousa, 2003; Vialle 1996), who argue that whilst people demonstrate an extensive range of individual strengths and weaknesses across differing domains (for example, cognitive-academic, artistic, personal-social and vocational-technical), it is patently obvious that not everyone is highly gifted or talented. This contrasts with a popular belief often articulated by educators and teachers that "all children are gifted". These latter views reflect, I suggest, an egalitarian inclination, one that implies that every child has an outstanding personal strength; but, simultaneously, this more inclusive understanding risks diffusing the notion that students with exceptional abilities actually exist.

Whilst most of the case-study teachers endeavoured to convey their definition of the terms gifted and talented and how they might be recognised, four of these teachers expressed some hesitations with the terms. Janet (whose own daughter is gifted) thinks the terms are 'tricky' to define (10, p. 2), Melanie

who considers that the brain can be trained (3, p. 5), Tamsin who equates MI with learning styles (9, p. 2) and Celeste who sees the terms as synonymous (7, p. 8), expressed the view that *all* children are gifted in some way (7, p. 10; 9, p. 3) or that *every* child has a talent (3, p. 7; 10, p. 13). These teachers are suggesting is that everyone is born with a potential but, as Freeman (2000) states, very few develop potential in its entirety or to a level of excellence.

Changing classroom practices

Researchers such as Sternberg and Davidson (2005) emphasise the importance of teachers becoming familiar ‘with identification procedures, instructional methods and instruments for assessment of achievement in gifted individuals’ (p. viii) so that teachers can proficiently translate gifted theory into practice. Such a perspective might also serve to perpetuate the thriving gifted education “commercial industry” that has emerged, which provides the materials to support classroom work. Listing a broad selection of checklists (e.g., Davis & Rimm, 2004; DoE Victoria 1996; EDWA, c1995; GCTFSS, 1981; Gross et al., 2005; Parker, 1993; Whitton, 2002) available to assist teachers identify gifted students, Steenholdt (2006) seems to imply that because they are available, teachers will use them. This was not the case however at Atlas Primary School (APS) when after the *Bright Futures* program all the resources, checklists and support materials were generally left to languish unused despite the inclusion of five teacher nomination checklists in the *Bright Futures* Resource Book which ‘are useful for the observation of students in structural and systematic ways’ (DoE 1996, p. 51). APS also bought the TAGS resource manual (EDWA, c1995) for its clear, “user friendly” format; one for each CSF level, which also includes checklists for identification (ID10-ID29) (Field notes).

The Assistant Principal thought that ‘[I]ndividual teachers might use [BF teacher] checklists] but I would think that as a generalisation they don’t’ (5, p. 16), an observation bluntly confirmed by Maria ‘No, I haven’t’ (6 p. 11) and Marjorie who said ‘I must say I haven’t assessed children under those in order to pick out people for C&O’ (11, p. 16). Celeste said that she was aware of the BF material but when asked if she had used it she replied, ‘Not really, not really’ (7, p. 14). She then deflected the discussion to the Early Years literacy

and numeracy program and the use of running records which she uses to ‘ascertain the exact level pretty much approximate the level that the kids are at, throughout the whole year so then the reading text that I provide them with in the classroom arena is catered exactly to them’ (7, p. 14 [sic]). Jeff was the only case-study participant who reported that he found checklists useful. However, rather than the *Bright Futures* support material, he prefers using the clearer Western Australia TAGS manual because ‘you refer to it and you can say, “Well, OK, what should I be doing? And you go on and you read and you think, “Well, I could do that or we could do that and this will fit in here and then I will have something to do”’ (1, p. 9).

Cashion and Sullenger (2000) reported that in a follow-up study a year after a summer institute on gifted education conducted in Canada, ‘only a few participants described any major changes in teaching practice’ (p. 18). This finding is congruent with my own research findings with respect to the limited extent of change in teaching practice at APS following the BFPD. Notwithstanding constricting environmental structures, class sizes or a lack of time, it appears that teachers continue to evolve in their teaching but transformation is slow. However, when confronted by new practices and pedagogy, without positive and ongoing impetus for change, the effort required to transform familiar practices can be daunting. If habitual practices seem to be “working”, the need for change may not even be seen as necessary. As Pears (1993) has suggested, when it comes to altering instructional practices, teachers might, even after professional development, not know how to next proceed; have difficulty knowing how to translate theory into practice or simply have no desire to effect change. Applying pure theory into classroom practice is not easy. Indeed, it can be a fragmented and haphazard process as teachers endeavour to make sense of what has been formally learnt - usually in remote and sterile settings vastly different to the “live classroom” containing a diversity of abilities and personalities - but, as Peter Wilson (1996, p. 71), a former Victorian teacher and principal states, ‘the approach to education of gifted and talented children must in the initial stages rest squarely with the classroom teacher.

Having considered the BF policy and the associated professional development, I now turn to how teachers at Atlas Primary School made sense and interpreted some of the ideas and theory and what it means in their day-to-day practice after the *Bright Futures* program.

Only one gifted student at APS?

As noted previously, there are numerous means and approaches available for identifying gifted students. Using the traditional IQ measures leads to the empirical deduction that 3%-5% or 17-29 APS students at the time of the study were gifted. According to Renzulli and Reis (2003), should students meet the three criteria of task commitment, creativity and above average general ability (i.e. gifted behaviours), up to 10%-15% of students could be classified as potentially gifted, which at the lower end of the range accords with Gagné's view that ten per cent of any population is gifted (AGQTP 2005, Module 1 p. 5). So, as noted earlier, in 2002, APS, with a school population of 580, could conservatively classify at least 58 students as gifted using both the Renzulli and Reis and the Gagné criteria. Yet many of the case-study participants primarily focus on only one student in the interviews. In the subsequent section of this chapter, I investigate this phenomenon.

Michael

Exceptional ability in mathematics is popularly regarded as an indicator of giftedness. In the case of the student I discuss here, Michael,⁴⁶ his identification as gifted was linked to his mathematical ability, and also linked in complex ways to his ethnicity and the teachers' beliefs about "Asian students". Michael's mathematical precocity, allied with his Asian ethnicity and gender permitted APS teachers to construct and identify him as gifted. Such nomenclature is made possible because of the marked difference in Michael's mathematical performance compared to his age related peers, but it also marks him as labelled, an "object" of the teachers' gaze. For example, first speaking of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) and then mathematics, Maria said:

he was Asian so he caught on ... and watching how his way of thinking towards maths and problem solving [was] just unbelievable ... it was quite amazing like he

⁴⁶ A pseudonym

knew things that obviously weren't exposed to him or taught to him at school but he knew of them and obviously his way of thinking - he was interested in that particular [thing] ... he told me all about square roots and I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh!" , I don't even know about square roots and he ... told me how he worked out the problems and things like that which was just quite unbelievable for a six or seven year old at that time (6, p. 5) ... he could tell you anything about maths (6, p. 6).

The Principal too is in awe: "He's just a bright fellow in the mathematical area – it's just amazing' (12, p. 19). Calling him "Little Michael" due to his diminutive stature, the Assistant Principal said he should 'be appropriately placed in Grade 5 because that's where his cognitive ability is operating at or probably even higher than that' (5, pp. 7-8). Although recognising the value of formal assessment, the AP nevertheless believed that teachers can intuitively ascertain giftedness but in the case of Michael she 'wasn't sure exactly where to place him in a continuum and so I think you need to use assessment to fine tune that sort of decision making' (5, p. 8). Even armed with this knowledge she admitted that whilst accelerated for mathematics, 'we actually put Michael in a grade lower than he actually came out at for six months so that he made the leap of a couple of grades and then the following year, promoted him with those kids to the next CSF [Curriculum Standards Framework] to be able to do Level Four' (5, p. 9).⁴⁷ Tamsin was the rather reluctant receiving teacher during this transition phase because the Assistant Principal had decided that within her class were 'like minded boys that he gets on really well with' (5, p. 11), signalling the social concerns held by the AP about "fitting in" (see Silverman 1995). Her position reflects the persistent notion (particularly amongst teachers) that affective and social problems are likely to occur if gifted children are placed with children beyond their age level (Taplin & White 1998), despite Australian research (Doherty 2003; Gross 1999c) which has shown that gifted children readily form friendships if they are permitted to interact with "like minded peers".

The AP reported that Tamsin 'didn't think he'd [Michael] be bright enough to cope with these kids initially and she was absolutely staggered ... he fits in really well' (5, p. 11). Speaking of the children with whom Michael was placed, the AP observed that 'they've learnt not to treat him as a mascot and in

⁴⁷ CSF Level 4 equates with Grades 5 & 6, the final two years in Victorian primary education.

fact when ...he gets them [problems] right and the others get them wrong, they're on their mettle and they treat him as an equal *now*. I mean at the start they thought he's cute, he's little and all the rest of it' (5, p. 11; her emphasis).

Freeman (2005) writes that mathematical precocity is not limited to a few outstanding students of predominantly Asian⁴⁸ heritage, a popular subjective view which might well be supported by the 2007 rankings in the International Mathematical Olympiad (Myers, 2007) where seven of the top twelve countries were Asian.⁴⁹ I suggest that in a general sense, APS teachers share a widely-held cultural stereotype with respect to students of Asian heritage, which is that all Asian students are achievement oriented, particularly in maths and the sciences. The Assistant Principal said, '[I]t always amazes me when I go to speech night at BH [a nearby secondary school] to see the lack of white Anglo-Saxon males walk across the stage getting prizes or awards and what-have-you. The girls are there, the Asian boys are there ... Chinese boys ... Asian girls' (5, p. 25). The AP's observation is in accord with Gross (2004) who has noted an over-representation of Asian students earning top scores in the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC) exams and receiving awards and prizes in WA.

Carole Harris (2007), considers that for an accurate identification of gifted immigrant children of Asian background - a blanket term for diverse nationalities, cultural practices, language and religious practices - assessment should include an awareness of these practices and other aspects such as 'economic and attitudinal factors, peer-group expectations, cross-cultural stress, and inter-generational conflict' (p. 6). She identifies the common characteristics shared amongst these peoples as 'strong family values, attention to courtesy, respect for elders, low risk-taking behaviour, propensity to conformity, fear of socially inappropriate behaviour, and hesitancy to question authority' (p. 6) (see also, Clark 2008; Gallagher, 2003; Gardner, 1989). Her salient point is that English language difficulties mask giftedness which is

⁴⁸ I understand that British writers consider Asia to mean Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, whilst East Asia includes China, Japan and Taiwan. Australia considers Asia the latter and includes Cambodia, Indonesia, Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

⁴⁹ Russia was first with the USA fifth.

none-the-less revealed in superior mathematical skills, a domain which has greater emphasis on non-verbal language and is less reliant on a fluent second language with its alien linguistic structures, a perspective echoed by Ruth who is employed by APS as the ESL specialist, who said:

I believe there're probably ESL children who are gifted, but because they're struggling with the language, it's very easy for them to be overlooked but you've only got to look at the VCE results to see how they dominate to know that a lot of them have got ... particular gifts in language or maths or science or - but picking it at the lower level is a bit difficult (15, p. 8).

Recognising the impact of a limited oral fluency in group work, Louise deliberated whether students should be included in the C&O program solely on their maths ability. She said:

I actually have one [Asian girl] who really is doing very, very well in her maths and for me it was a dilemma because I thought if we're really selecting on maths, maybe she has a right to give it a go. So, on speaking to the C&O teacher we decided to trial it, and it's been a fairly disrupted program this second half of the year and so she hasn't had many sessions but evidently you know in small groups she is getting the confidence to participate a bit more ... and I said that was a criteria. I said to her before she went, I said you will have to participate, you will have to join in with discussions otherwise I'll have to let someone else go (2, p. 14).

However, a number of ESL students voluntarily participate in the APS Chess Club. Ruth notes that 'it's interesting because all the instructions, of course, are given in English but because your receptive language is always ahead of your expressive. You know, one little boy has only been in Australia eighteen months or something and there he is holding a chess trophy, it was amazing' (15, p. 18). She feels that chess is 'probably one of the best aspects of the [APS] program I'd say because it does involve kids in genuine thinking that they wouldn't do in the classroom ... I think it's absolutely wonderful ... and if you could have seen the ESL kids holding up their trophy with the grins on their faces!' (15, pp. 25-26). Recognising the sense of achievement and pride felt by her ESL students, Ruth endorses the value of the APS Chess Club and its involvement in inter-school competitions, but her empathy for the challenges faced by ESL students is not universally shared at APS. Speaking of her friend and colleague, Ruth found Tamsin's "performance accountability" approach to ESL students in general, and one boy in particular, rather frustrating because she would remove the student from the reading support group because 'he's not keeping up' (15, p. 21) but Ruth said that he

really should have stayed. He couldn't really keep up. He maybe wasn't putting in the full effort but you can't always expect them to know so - and she did that a few times

... the kids were ready to come to me and she said, "Have you read your book?" and they said, "No" well in the next week they'd be whipped out of the group. I'd start again the next week with someone else. In the end I said, "Oh please don't change them any more", you know, it's very unsettling (15, p. 21).

Ruth did not challenge Tamsin on a professional basis because, 'I couldn't, being a friend – it's hard to argue with friends' (15, p. 21).

Perhaps signalling the inherent complexity of understanding effort and application within a Confucian discourse, the case-study teachers at APS were cautious about sharing their observations and experiences. However, they did broach the subject, intimating that for many students of Asian background (particularly Michael who will be discussed in the next section), perceived differences to the mainstream cohort were worthy of comment.

Mathematically gifted students

According to Gross (Quek 2003), mathematically gifted students are more likely to be accelerated by schools because of their greater "nuisance value" to teachers. Gross suggests that it is much easier to send a primary school child gifted in language off to read after the completion of set tasks, whereas 'it is not simple when the child is mathematically gifted – she can't be told to go off and create some maths problems to work on!' (Quek 2003, p. 103). However, Baldwin, Vialle and Clarke (2000) observed that teachers modify both language and mathematics more than other areas of the curriculum. This might be because the empirical and quantitative measurement of a student's progress in language and mathematics is relatively easily undertaken, therefore teachers have a higher degree of confidence in their ability to observe and monitor both the positive and the impact of changes than in subject areas where the effect of changes are more subtle, and therefore are more comfortable that they are in control of the changes.

The Principal holds reservations about the appropriateness of APS provision for Michael describing him as 'a particularly talented lad in Maths' (12, p. 19) but senses that 'I don't think we've particularly really met his needs in Grade Four this year. I think he's been going to Grade Five for Maths ... but I don't think that's even met his needs and see what are we going to do with him next

year? I know we're trying to set something up with R. S. [mathematics consultant] at the moment' (12, p. 19). The Principal suspects that although some form of provision is in place, it is not entirely adequate and so signals his desperation for the coming year. Whilst APS is attempting to accommodate Michael's mathematical learning needs, it seems that he does not enjoy the complete benefits of acceleration in the form of grade skipping or subject acceleration commensurate with his learning needs. Braggett (1986) is of the view that '[S]imple grade skipping is an expedient to overcome the inability of the school to cultivate education that is individually based, an expression of administrative frustration' (p. 23).

Michael's then current classroom teacher, Marjorie acknowledges that he is 'doing advanced mathematics ...way beyond Level 4 now' (11, p. 10) but within her structured classroom approach observes that 'when he's got spare time at the end of say a one hour session ... he's put in his work to me, he has the last twenty minutes of his own research project work or computer time or whatever, he's going to browse through books – which is really independently constructive' (11, p. 11). Michael, left to his own devices, 'has already found that there are a couple of fellows who are maths curriculum consultants ... who have set up a web site where they pose a weekly problem or they run equations and various things on their site and the child is able to enter in their answers and send them through and then the teacher responds to them the following week' (11, p. 10).⁵⁰ Whilst it is admirable that APS has provided independent research time and, by self admission, a conservative approach to single subject acceleration, such measures frustrate Fleur. From her perspective as an educational psychologist she states:

Sometimes I suggest some sort of curriculum modifications, like, for example, doing maths from the year above or like rarely, promotion to another grade for a student that's very socially mature and extremely capable academically but I think schools are very reluctant to consider that. They'll consider keeping a child *back* a grade. Every year in every grade there's a child just about, who's considered to be kept back but if I suggest accelerating a child, even if you say, "Look, this child's not really socially linked with children of the same age because they're socially mature, reading four or five year levels above the grade that they're in, capably doing maths two years ahead or something like that, so really, really very capable academically and mature

⁵⁰ R. S. recalls working with a number of boys at APS but could not specifically recall Michael (R. S. 2008, pers. comm. 29th May).

socially,” still the schools are *extremely* reluctant, extremely reluctant to do it. [They] don't like it' (8, p. 3).

Contrary to Marjorie's assessment that Michael is 'independently constructive' (11, p. 11) I argue that it is highly problematic for a student to be solely responsible for seeking appropriately challenging extension work when set class work has been completed. Advocates for gifted education find issue with students left to fend for themselves or doing “busy work” (see Bailey 2004; Hoekman & McCormick 1999; Townsend 1996) under the guise of “doing independent research” unless the tasks have an authentic purpose and educational value. However, I do recognise the significance of less structured or “free choice” periods during the primary school day allowing students to follow an interest for pure enjoyment or curiosity. It appears that Michael is sufficiently motivated to seek challenging work from bona fide sources but without professional guidance, his prowess could lead him into less safe and questionable virtual environments and the school could be held accountable for any negative impacts of such wanderings.

The seven case study participants who either currently work with or have had dealings with Michael mentioned him as “The Gifted Student” of APS; as Fleur said, he ‘came already sort of stamped and labelled, “Very Capable in Maths”’ (8, p. 4). However, other teachers who have not worked with Michael did mention other students they considered to be gifted. Without exception, they all were boys with strong mathematical abilities such as one of Louise's Grade Three students who ‘actually goes and does Maths in Grade Four’ (2, p. 3). Only Celeste, who understands giftedness solely ‘from my own life experiences’ (7, p. 13) brought to mind a ‘one particular boy who's very gifted with his reading’ (7, p. 8) rather than mathematics. The aspect of gender differentiation related to subject domains and teachers' perceptions of giftedness will be further discussed in Chapter Seven.

Assessing giftedness

In Victorian schools, it is not the standard practice to ascertain the cognitive ability or academic potential of all students with measures such as an IQ assessment. However, some parents choose to pay private providers for such a

service (for example, CHIP (2004) whose reports are recognised by the Victorian education department).

Melanie noted that a formal assessment process undertaken by one of her former Prep students (not Michael), was ‘the one you do up until seven [years old], and it didn’t take him far enough ... ‘cause he was only five’. Suspecting that the test ceiling did not reveal the “truth” about his capabilities, Melanie also pointed to the divide between teachers and the ‘professionally qualified persons’ (Marland 1972, p. 2) permitted to formally identify students. Unable to remember the name of the assessment instrument, saying, ‘What is it? The WISH? Whistler?’ (3, p. 14). Melanie, with over two decades of teaching experience, desired a greater understanding of the actual assessment process and a more detailed explanation of the results, indicating a seeming lack of communication between the ‘professionally qualified persons’ administering the tests and those who are entrusted to enact upon the measured score. Melanie said:

I’d like to see an intelligence test and see what it involves, but we don’t see that side of things, you see the results. You get a little percentage thingy or number but you don’t really see what the test involves, or if there’s an area of weakness that’s come out in the test. You might get that, a bit of information like they’re not very good at comprehension or something like that but you don’t get the full picture (3, p. 9).

Melanie also claimed the student has been ‘the only child I’ve ever had classed as gifted’ (3, p. 12) perhaps signalling the success of the BFPD to advance awareness of the gifted child concept. Yet, despite the student reaching the assessment ceiling demonstrating an above-age capability, he was promoted with his age peers to Grade One. Melanie assumed that ‘he’s being catered for as far as I know within the program; he does get individual work most of the time, like when it’s appropriate’ (3, p. 14). Even though it appears in this instance that provision might well be cognitively inappropriate, Melanie does not consider that an undemanding program could lead the student to boredom and underachievement. She says that ‘he doesn’t extend himself, so you’ve got to extend him. Like he won’t push himself, he hides it ... he’s a little bit lazy’ (2, p. 14). Thus, in manner not dissimilar to Michael’s class situation, Melanie places the onus of responsibility for learning and extension on the student rather than the teacher. Gross (2004), expresses surprise that highly gifted

students who are presented with class work well below their tested ability level do not rebel more frequently. Perhaps these students adopt the strategy, as discussed earlier in the chapter, of finishing the unchallenging tasks as quickly as possible to maximise their time for more interesting individual pursuits. For example, I observed a highly able APS Grade 6 student race through a language worksheet before immersing himself in a Latin-English-Latin dictionary (Field notes 1996).

Ziegler and Stoeger (2003) found that teachers tend to normalise their judgements about students and found that teachers make conservative judgements about ability, such as estimating highly gifted students as mildly gifted. Celeste, a Prep teacher, who thought ‘the kids won’t know any numbers ... they won’t know about adding’ (7, p. 14) analysed her classroom test results and was ‘hugely impressed by what the kids knew’ (7, p. 14). She subsequently modified her approach because ‘I would have been teaching stuff the kids knew. What’s the point of that?’ (7, p. 14). But some of the APS case-study participants (Louise, Celeste, The Principal, Pam) challenged the results of the mandated state-wide tests, the Achievement Assessment Monitor (AIM) and the “above level” assessment achieved by students. Their reactions failed to consider that the AIM tests might have identified underachieving students. Louise felt it ‘one fault of the AIM, that it often marks children up’ (2, p. 6) because chance plays a part in the results as ‘you’ve got a one-in-four chance of getting it right anyway cos you circle the bubble’ (2, p. 6). Such comments reflect Ziegler and Stoeger’s (2003) conclusion that the educational community (teachers, parents and even the students themselves), tend to underestimate ability compared to test results. Yet, the APS Principal, recently writing to parents about the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) which replaced the AIM stated that:

[M]uch of the publicity states that the results will inform teachers. Let me assure you that the results will not be a surprise to your child’s teacher. Your child’s teacher is fully aware of your child’s strengths and weaknesses ...I’m not sure, that I’m convinced as much as our politicians are, of the value of this testing program! Overall our results in all areas were well above the State levels (APS Bulletin Issue 30, 2008 p. 1).

Teachers open to outside assessment for giftedness

As a corollary to the circumstances described above related to Melanie’s student, APS does act upon parent initiated assessments. This stands in

contrast to Jodie Valpied's (2005) findings that some schools are reluctant to accept such assessments, despite the Department of Education Victoria (1996) stating that formal assessments providing an IQ score are to be considered as one of a raft measures to identify gifted students. The Assistant Principal, although signalling scepticism to both parental summations and teacher observations said:

There is a perception in the school community amongst *parents* that their children should go to these programs [C&O] ... We did find one child a couple of years ago who went off to - a girl, who went off to do an assessment for a gifted program somewhere else, and came out as highly able and had never demonstrated that in this school population at all who we then immediately sent off to C&O so we can take direction. We can have things pointed out to us, but no teacher that had had this child had ever - and good teachers, had ever seen it, nor had the child probably ever shown it. And I think that had to do with some - a bit with the position in the family and the other kids' abilities above [her] and all that sort of, or lack of abilities above. And also sometimes the child is born into a family where the kids are *not* academic, and so by the time they get to the third one the expectation is that they are not academic and they live that role which is what I think happened in this case (5, pp. 26-27).

The AP's statement suggests that at APS "what gets measured does indeed get managed", particularly when assessments by outside providers are brought to the school's attention.

For schools such as APS, situated in a socio-economic locale characterised by an educated and relatively high-income parent population and consequently a school community that highly values not only formal education but achievement in many fields of endeavour, the classroom composition must, by default, reflect its social population. Thus, although a spectrum of ability is evident, there is not the chasm of 'intellectual isolation' (see Freeman, 2001, p. 15) one might normally expect between the highly gifted and the rest of a school population – as evidenced by APS AIM scores.

Conclusion

In this chapter my primary focus has been the perspectives of the teachers as they considered their conceptual understanding of giftedness and subsequent classroom and school practice after experiencing the *Bright Futures* professional development program. Relations of power and resistance and how they are expressed and played out between the teachers, the principal class, parents and formal policies have been identified. I have ascertained that teachers hold differing views and beliefs regarding "the gifted" and that

participation in mandated “gifted” professional learning does not automatically translate into efficacious classroom or school practices as seen by the ad hoc nature of student selection for the Challenges and Opportunities program. The sway of personal knowledge and assumptions about gifted students and their relative strengths is influenced not by the research literature or professional development but by tenacity of long held assumptions about gifted students. In the following chapter, I continue my discussion of teachers’ classroom practices after the *Bright Futures* professional development but turn my focus to teachers’ gendered constructions of giftedness with a particular emphasis on gifted girls at the Atlas Primary School.

Chapter Seven

Whose *Bright Futures*? Gendered dimensions of gifted education at Atlas Primary School

In earlier chapters, I documented some of the effects of a discourse of egalitarianism on Australian education, arguing that gifted education sits uneasily alongside this ethos. In addition, as historical studies reveal, a discourse of egalitarianism is juxtaposed to educational practices, provisions and resources that have never actually been equitable in terms of gender, class and race. Reflecting dominant social truths, schools in Australia have been sites for the negotiation and formation of gendered practices since their inception, conventionally privileging masculinity. The effects of past gendered practices were reflected in, for example, girls' lower rates of post-compulsory school participation and retention, a narrow range of post-school options and pathways and barriers to university entrance. Since the 1970s, this situation has considerably altered, due in large part to the influence of feminism and the associated emphasis on gender equity in education policy work (see, for example, Australian Education Council 1992; Butorac & Lymon 1998; Commonwealth Schools Commission 1975; Gender Equity Taskforce 1997; McLeod 1995; State Board of Education 1990; Yates 1993). In recent times, however, perceptions that girls' educational achievements have occurred at the expense of boys have provoked something of a backlash against feminist educational reforms (see, for example, Francis & Skelton 2001; Hayes 1998; McLeod 2001).

During and immediately prior to the period of my case study research, much educational discussion in Australia and beyond was focused on the relative educational achievements of girls and boys, in particular concerns about the educational experiences and outcomes of boys and the documented tendency for girls on average to achieve higher end of school examination scores than boys (Arnot, David & Weiner 1999; Collins, Kenway & McLeod 2000). There was also much discussion of gender and educational performance in relation to classroom behaviour, discipline and school retention (Connell 2000; Francis

2000; Francis & Skelton 2001; Holden 2002; Lingard 2003; Lingard et al. 2002). Such concerns, initially evident in the mid-1990s, have remained prominent in educational debates and policies a decade later (Gibb, Ferguson & Horwood 2008). As Arnot et al. (1999) argue, it is important not to underestimate the role the media has played in generating interest in gender debates during this period. In Victoria, the print media, often arguing from the binary perspective of girl versus boy, focused particularly on school-related gender issues such as single-sex schools (highlighting attitudinal differences to learning between girls and boys) and the lower literacy performances of boys compared with girls. The subtext within many of these debates implied that girls' school successes are achieved at the expense of boys who, it was suggested, were largely educated by a feminised teaching work force (see for example, Jones 2000; Kissane 2001a, 2001b; Saccotelli 2001). While local policy and political contexts are important to understand gender and school programs in Victoria, changes beyond the local context might also have influenced such claims, such as the resurgence internationally of interest in male and female learning styles and accompanying "essentialist" accounts of gender identity. Bob Lingard (1998) suggests that "big picture" movements, such as economic globalisation and new racisms, might have played a part in re-emphasising essentialist masculinities.

As educational discourses and practices are not immune from social and cultural influences, the macro and micro level focus on masculinities, alongside wider concerns about boys' education is likely to have influenced, in some measure, the development of school policies and programs at Atlas Primary School. The APS School Charter (2000-2002) was developed during this time, and reflects, as I elaborate below, the tenacity of maleness as the default standard. I further argue that despite more than three decades of gender equity work in schools, and explicit public debate about the role of women and of feminism, educational practices within Atlas Primary School, whether or not intentional, continue to favour boys over girls and that this is particularly evident in the selection, identification and description of gifted children.

Within its official documentation and policies, APS appears mindful of the requirement to use neutral or non-sexist language; however, there is a strong focus on the education of boys in the Charter document (2000-2002). One ‘school specific’ goal achievement measure for curriculum is to examine the ‘[A]chievement Level of boys against expected CSF level’ (APS School Charter 2000-2002, p. 4.) An improvement area is to evaluate ‘the effectiveness of programs directed to the literacy and numeracy needs of students at risk such as Educational Maintenance Allowance students, boys and others whose progress warrants special attention and monitoring’ (APS School Charter 2000-2002, p. 4). In addition, often less than prudent comments from staff indicated a more pronounced concern with the education of boys, and less concern about how girls were faring. For example, the Assistant Principal commented that ‘we’ve got lots girls that are good ... and if they [gifted girls] were here they would be identified in the same way as the two boys ... as long as they demonstrated their giftedness’ (5, p. 18). Her comments are revealing, not only because they expose the problematic nature of what actually constructs the concept of giftedness and how these are manifest and recognised by others, but also because any such construct is by no means gender neutral and universal. The Assistant Principal’s comment is also at odds with research findings reported by Collins et al. (2000) who, although speaking of Year 12 assessment results rather than primary-aged students, concluded that there is no gender differentiation between high achievers; although for average students, average girls outperform average boys. Further, related findings are reported by Gibb, Fergusson and Horwood (2008) in reference to examining New Zealand data suggesting ‘that gender differences in educational achievement are not the result of gender differences in cognitive ability’ (p. 74).

My initial observation as the Challenges and Opportunities teacher in 1998 (Field notes) that teachers selected boys in preference to girls for gifted programs suggests that a somewhat differing subtext was at play. As I document below, teacher attitudes and practices are at odds with not only sections of the APS School Charter (2000-2002) document, which emphasises educational equality for all students (but, paradoxically, highlights boys) but also the current research on girls’ achievements. In this chapter, I focus on one

of the most fundamental constructs of being, that of gender with a particular emphasis on gifted education. Recognising the complexities surrounding gender – indeed, McLeod (2008, p. 1) considers the term ‘an over-determined signifier ... called upon to perform much analytic and descriptive work’ – I explore and analyse how the case study participants were not only beholden to numerous ‘external’ factors such as parental expectations and school practices, but were also influenced by their own gendered assumptions when undertaking their professional work, whether it be creating policy documents or scrutinising and selecting students for gifted programs.

With these comments as background, the chapter begins with a discussion of debates concerning the category and construct of “gender” and its relation to learning orientations and aptitudes, then moves to explore how these matters are perceived by the case-study participants. The overall analysis of this chapter is underpinned by a feminist concern with the significance and effects of perceived gender differences in learning and their salience for policies and programs in gifted education. In addition, drawing from my conceptual “tool kit” the analysis is guided by key Foucauldian concepts as outlined in Chapter Three. I examine broader and influential socio-cultural discourses within which schools and teachers’ work is situated and the kind of “regimes of truth” about gender differences and learning, and the norms of the gifted child that are expressed in teachers’ views on girls, boys and giftedness. As such, I argue that the *Bright Futures* policy did not give ‘all students ... the opportunity to achieve their full potential’ (DSE 1995, n. p.), for there remains a doubt that teachers provide equality of opportunity for both girls and boys. Thus, girls continue to be marginalised by school policies and teacher practices indicating that much work remains to be done to foster equality of school opportunity for both girls and boys.

Gender

The process of gender identity construction and differentiation is governed by dominant socio-cultural norms, expectations and values tempered by stereotypes, biases and discrimination. Building on previous commonwealth and national equal opportunity policies and action plans, the important 1997

Gender Equity Taskforce policy framework stresses that the ‘[U]nderstanding of gender is crucial if schools and systems are to work for equitable educational experiences for boys and girls’ (p. 11). Some suggest that such recognition of gender involves deconstructing binary and conventional constructions of femininity and masculinity, and that this then might allow for the possibility of equality of achievement between the sexes (Davis & Rimm 1994; Jackson 1998; Riddell 1992). However, until this occurs, differing opportunities, choices and pathways for males and females persistently remain in many fields of endeavour (Jerums 2001; Pinker 2008). Many researchers have argued that it is socio-culturally based influences and not biologically determined sex differences that are the principal reasons for the limitations imposed upon the potential of all girls and women, not just those who are considered gifted (Davis & Rimm 1994; Ellis & Willinsky 1991; Estes 1992; Faludi 1992; Kloosterman & Surana 2003; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman & Rimm 2000). Into this fusion of argument related to educational policy, practice and culture affecting girls, there has been a growing concern since the mid 1990s on the education of boys (see, for example, Commonwealth of Australia 2003; Connell 2000; Weaver-Hightower 2003). It would be foolish to disregard the caveat of “which girls, which boys and which contexts” in any discussion related to gender but nevertheless, my focus in this case-study site is upon the perceived gender bias against girls.

There has also been somewhat of a resurgence of interest in neurobiological explanations of gender differences, what cognitive neuroscientist Cordelia Fine has characterised as a new form of ‘neurofallacy’. Fine warns that ‘[T]eaching based on gender stereotypes dressed-up in neuroscientific finery runs the risk of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy’ (Fine 2008, p. 24). At the same time, persuasive arguments regarding the combined influence of biological predispositions plus limitations placed upon themselves by gifted women are gaining currency (see Pinker 2008), a position that (Fine 2007) considers reinforces stereotypical perspectives. I do not dispute that men and women do have different biological, cultural, emotional and social experiences, but these fail to account for women not enjoying the same levels of success as men in many fields of endeavour. Rather than innate biological differences, it is the

socio-cultural environment, encompassing family expectations, early childhood experiences, gender stereotyping, classroom management, instructional practices and assessment that contribute to the gender gap (Fine 2007; Kirner & Rayner 1999; Kloosterman & Suranna 2003; Tindall & Hamil 2004).

As Joan Kirner (former Premier of Victoria, 1990-1992) and Moira Rainer (lawyer and human rights advocate) write,

Most of the important decisions in public and private life have until very recently assumed that men's lives and expectations are the only ones there are. Many women want to make a difference and our world a better place. They need power to do it, but it isn't easy for women to be powerful in what has been a man's world for thousands of years (Kirner & Rayner 1999, p. 2).

Linking such arguments to the concept and assessment of intelligence as constructed by 19th century masculine scientificity, Gardner (1999, p. 109) suspects that 'if intelligence-fair tests were developed, they would reveal differences across gender and other readily identifiable groups ... [with] potentially explosive' ramifications. Gardner has chosen a conservative and cautious option to skirt the issues of gender and "other" because 'apparent group differences have been exploited for politically dubious ends ... and I prefer not to provide additional ammunition for such efforts' (p. 110). Nevertheless, his position has implications for not only understanding the concepts of intelligence and the construct of giftedness but for how these are enacted in school practices.

Gendered behaviours

Adopting the perspective that 'gender is the most substantial, pervasive and taken-for-granted social structural feature that shapes our lives' (Evans 1989, p. 73), it is hardly surprising that deeply rooted beliefs, stereotypes and generalisations of the dominant socio-cultural mores and patterns concerning gender and behaviour continue to hold sway, not only by the broader community, but also within institutions such as schools and reflected in the behaviours I observed at Atlas Primary School. As previously argued in this thesis, the tacit assumptions teachers hold about their students affect all aspects of classroom practice, including teacher behaviours based upon perceived or imagined gender differences in learning (Kagan 1992). This is not to imply that

teachers are the sole or primary influence on children's learning; clearly peer relationships and parents' gender-based expectations influence both their perceptions of their children's ability and their children's self perceptions of ability (Jacobs & Weisz 1994; Rimm et al. 2000). Even so, teachers' views and overall school cultures remain influential. When discussing their students' behaviour, the APS case study participants reveal profoundly gendered beliefs and points of view, which are often closely intertwined with not only their views on giftedness, but on other categories of identity such as dis/ability, race, class and socio-economic status.

Representing gender difference

Turning now to the views of the teacher participants, it is evident that how to talk about, describe and represent girls and boys was a recurring and important issue. What was the most appropriate language? Should distinctions be made between girls and boys, or should a position of gender neutrality be adopted? What constituted gender discrimination, and what was reasonable recognition of (apparent) gender differences? These were questions with which many of the teachers struggled. When asked how many girls and boys were in his class, Jeff replied:

Oh, don't ask me! I don't perceive them in that way [as boys and girls]... I think that there's 17 boys and 12 girls – I think ... they're not special ... I think of them more as individuals – at which their gender is part ... and normally I don't connect like that, not in the sense of [gender] ... I certainly used to but really more for organisational purposes than for anything else like that ... when I can't find some work I'll count up and I should know if I've got 12 girls and if I've got [17 boys] then I know to look for a boy or something like that (1, pp. 2-3).

Although Jeff earnestly endeavours to not notice gender difference and portray a balanced approach both to girls and boys, his attempts to be gender neutral or “politically correct” betray a gendered bias. When examining his transcript (Participant 1) it becomes clear that albeit unconsciously, Jeff favours the male to the female pronoun with a ratio of 2:1; thus Jeff projects and validates a particular subjective reality reflected in the repeated and unmarked use of the male form of the pronoun within his discourse. This seemingly innocuous act disguises much complexity. While professing a kind of gender neutrality, his everyday speech suggests that his imagined student is male. Claims of not noticing gender are overturned and a subtle gender bias is illuminated when

employing particular turns of phrase. Such habits of speech and thinking have serious implications for classroom practices and for the girls and boys within them.

More than two decades ago, Gilah Leder (1987), observing primary teachers in grades three and six noted that ‘with few exceptions the boys received more of the teacher’s attention ... The pattern is repetitive, cumulative and powerful’ (pp. 7-8) (similar observations have been made by others; see, for example, Kerr & Foley Nicpon 2003; Martel 1991; McLeod 2001; Measor & Sikes 1992; Thorne 1993). Leder suggested that the long-term effects of such lopsided attention could contribute to and/or reinforce gendered perceptions of girls and boys as learners. It appears very little has changed over the past three decades as (perhaps, but not always inadvertently) educators simultaneously nurture male talent development and discourage or even sacrifice girls’ education to benefit boys (Charlton et al. 2007; Francis & Skelton 2001). Numerous research studies have documented the difficulties faced by many girls and young women as they move through schooling, particularly noting the relationship between one’s sense of self-identity and learning. An influential body of research has explored how by adolescence many girls have succumbed to populist notions of “being a girl”, promulgated by cultural and sexual stereotyping, and girls begin to deliberately underachieve or enrol in less challenging disciplines (Kerr 1996; Kerr & Foley Nicpon 2003; Measor & Sikes 1992; Rimm et al. 2000; Siegle & Reis 1998; Yelland & Grieshaber 1998). Other girls are caught up the “perfection complex”⁵¹ setting unrealistic goals as they endeavour to be “the best” (Reis 1991), or if successful, suffer from internal doubts rather than external societal pressures, leading to syndromes such as the “Cinderella complex”, the “impostor phenomenon” (see Kerr 1985, 1996; Reis 1991) or the “fear of success syndrome”, first observed by Martina Horner in 1972 (Reis 1991). In the specific case of gifted girls, Kloosterman and Suranna (2003) suggest that their self-confidence, as with

⁵¹ I am not suggesting that gifted boys are immune to fears related to perfectionism or failure, for as Clark (2008) states, “this fear may be confounded by the knowledge that they [gifted male learners] have extraordinary ability and a record of outstanding achievement, making it actually possible for them to do something perfectly. Their goals are high, often unrealistically high, because they can envision an exemplary outcome’ (p. 132).

their “non-gifted” female peers, begins to wane in the early years of schooling. Further, although gifted girls and young women currently have many more educational opportunities and advantages than in earlier times, present-day classroom practices continue to be influenced by gender conflicts and the residual effects of past inequities.

Perceived gender differences in aptitudes and interests

As Walkerdine (1984) notes, teachers are trained to be observers of children and their interactions. Observing children not only at work in the classroom, but also at play, is one of the many component elements that contribute to teachers’ judgements regarding gender differences. Schools are sites for multiple same-age gender comparisons and these cannot be completely free from personal evaluations and value judgements, despite claims that the all-seeing gaze is one of dispassionate objectivity (Walkerdine 1984). Working within the parameters of inclusive child-centred pedagogy (albeit grounded in an outcomes-based curriculum), contemporary teachers are acculturated to seek, recognise and normalise differences in learning, ability, and behaviour in what Barrie Thorne (1993) calls ‘crowded settings’ (p. 52). Over time, classroom researchers (Goodenough Pitcher & Hickey Schultz 1983; Hodgeon 1988 cited in Measor & Sikes 1992; MacNaughton 2000) have noted the differing choices made when girls and boys self-select play materials, activities and play areas. Similarly, when observing their students, some of the case-study participants report on perceived gender differences, noting that boys are primarily concerned with objects and the girls with nurturance. For Helen, these differences are overt:

[i]t is really obvious, the boys that go in for the abstract building blocks where they create. It’s a fantasy world really of their own but connected to mechanical things The plastic things become robots, space ships ... a little bit of maybe what’s happening on television and movies at the time ... whereas the girls will tend to go towards the farm animals and create a living community ... this is the mother in charge of all the hens ... the boys continue with the same thing whereas the girls just shift from ... play [to] I’ll be tidying up. The housewife comes out in the girls ... it also comes out in their work – the gender thing ... the girls will ... imitate and then extend their own skills (4b, p. 13).

Glenda MacNaughton (2000) has documented similar persistent gender patterns and sexist expectations in relation to play in early childhood settings. Strong, nurturing behaviours are labelled as “gifted” by Celeste, who by

condoning one child's domestic diligence, reinforces the orthodoxy of what is appropriate behaviour for a girl, that is to be neat, selfless, emotional sensitive and just clever enough to be socially acceptable. Celeste said:

I've got one little girl who is just the most caring child, I'll be reading on the carpet and she'll be going around checking that everyone's chair's pushed in, checking that there's no sheets hanging out of the chair bags, checking that everyone's lunch and everything's you know, organised in their pigeon holes. [She] constantly will put other people's needs before her [own]. Certainly she's a very capable reader, certainly she's a very capable writer, mathematician, artistic, literally, she's fantastic at everything, not outstanding, but fantastic, loves it, but as I said, her huge gift is her awareness of other people's feelings. She's so sensitive to other people, it's really wonderful. Because as I said, she'll constantly put everyone else before her and she's the baby; she's got two other older brothers, but it's wonderful. She's very much a little mum within the classroom, and as I said, that's her gift because she's very much - not to the detriment of others maintaining positive relationships and if someone's fallen over, she'll be the first to take them to sick bay, or if someone's upset for whatever reason in the classroom she'll go and get them Millie, who's our class bear, give them the teddy or give them a tissue if they've fallen over or whatever, and as I said, that's certainly her gift (7, p. 11).

Cooperative play is generally considered to be developmental in nature and increases as children grow older - although both younger and older children can and do engage in both solitary and interactive games (Goodenough Pitcher & Hickey Schultz 1983; McInerney & McInerney 2006; Pinker 2008). Psychologist Susan Pinker (2008), observing that the peak of male aggression is during the pre-school years, writes that with maturity, boys become less aggressive as they learn social rules and skills but, until this developmental milestone is reached, boys are less able than girls to contain their impulses. Much research on children's play is embedded in such developmental discourses, and these have been highly influential in teacher education and professional development (e. g. McInerney & McInerney 2006), as is evident in the responses of teachers at APS. Observing children at play guides Melanie to ascertain which skills require formal attention and development, such as cooperative learning skills or group work. Melanie notes of her Prep year cohort:

[t]hey [boys] lack the social skills the girls have, so as soon as you put them in a group situation, a lot of them get silly and you know, pushy and because they don't have the social skills to work in a group unless you teach them, so you actually need to say to the group of boys ... [that] you're going to look at how you're cooperating or you're going to look at [sharing] today when you're working in your group, you're going to try to work really hard on the sharing aspect or you know, the taking turns or whatever; they need that pointed out to them. Some of the girls do too, but a lot of the time, the girls have those skills much better than the boys do ... [don't know why] whether it's in them, I don't know (3, p. 18)

Although Melanie takes an interventionist approach, she attempts to moderate the boys' behaviour for social compliance, or perhaps even for ease of teacher management. A number of explanations can be offered as to why this is a significant challenge for teachers. For example, according to Measor and Sikes (1992) small group work works better for girls than boys. Melanie tempers what might well be boys jockeying for a position of power or, alternatively as researchers such as Gurian, Henley and Trueman (2002) and Pollock (1999) posit, the effects of differing brain functionality between girls and boys, which disposes boys to play with much movement and make-believe violence. While there are competing explanations of these gender and classroom interactions, the key point here is how Melanie, an experienced teacher, attempts to make sense of, and explain, the situation. She is at once mindful and puzzled how socially constructed gender norms can be unsettled when children, including "bright" ones, cross gender boundaries and choose to play in the realm supposedly belonging to the opposite sex:

[the boy who likes Barbie®] nearly always chooses to go in the home corner so he's got the little home making skills as they - like, that must be innate - that can't have been learnt I don't think. He has an older brother, but see this same little boy is very, very bright, the one that likes the Barbie® dolls and his brother's the opposite; there's only two boys in the family' (3, p. 19).

Likewise, Celeste speaks of the specific choices made by her students, suggesting that already constructed in the minds of her Prep students, certain play choices reinforce and maintain oppositional gender categories (see Francis 1998) unless they are lured by familiarity with a game or acceptable props.

[g]enerally the boys will tend to go towards the computers although some of the girls now have seen what the boys do on the computers and feel very comfortable. P'raps the reason they didn't choose [computers] was because they didn't know what the programs were about whereas I've got a few more adventurous boys in the room [who think], "I don't know what the game is but I'm going to try it see what happens," if I *die* or whatever on the computer game, that's fine you know, so for some of the girls, perhaps they felt a bit reluctant to do that you know. Generally the boys wouldn't go into the Home Corner, at the start of the year whereas the girls have got the crown and have got the wand and have got the bridal dress so that was fine, whereas now we've got a few things ... we've got a stethoscope various things, so the boys are happy to go in there now (7, p. 17; her emphasis).

Eric, acknowledging that his comments are binary constructions couched in terms of "boys are active/girls are passive", made observations similar to Melanie regarding one of his female students whose kinaesthetic tendencies led her to traverse female territory to inhabit the sporting domain considered male – without, it appears, any challenge from the boys:

Like I had this one girl, this year who loves sport; she is really good at sport and as another generalisation, that as a general rule and I know it's a generalisation the *boys* are more motivated to do sport, so at lunchtime the boys'll tend to be outside playing soccer or football or cricket or something and a lot of the girls would be sitting outside drawing and this sort of stuff but there was this one girl. Who was very *good* at sport and was really into it and she never played with any of the girls, all she ever did was play with the boys you see, cos she wanted to do those kind of physical activities and there's an example of – and I know it's not in terms of their *work* but in terms of their groupings that – and she wanted to – at the end of the year when she they had to write their preferences, she wrote all boys you know because they had – not because, simply because she sort of liked doing what they did (16, p. 37; his emphasis).

However, Janet feels that particularly for boys, change has occurred 'because we're more aware of exposing them all to intelligences' (10 p. 7), also signalling that Multiple Intelligences theorising has informed current teaching practice. But importantly, Janet intimates that her own professional perceptions have played a particular role in her own awareness or otherwise of gendered classroom choices.

When I first started teaching, girls were definitely more arty and crafty than boys, and showed more potential in drawing and art, but *now*, in my teaching I can see that the boys are pretty well, most of them, ah, have sort of caught up, that gap is ...when I first started teaching the art might have been in the classroom, the art might have been offered against, this is not specialist art, offered against something else which the boys preferred to choose, so they didn't, do you know what I'm trying to say? I just, I just noticed, like, that I think a lot more boys are showing talent in drawing and, and art, and artistic things than when I first started teaching, unless I just wasn't aware of it (10, pp. 7-8; her emphasis).

Cultural diversity and gendered perceptions

Perhaps because, as Marjorie identifies, the Atlas Primary School community is 'basically homogeneous ... probably the last one in Victoria' (11, p. 4) members from backgrounds other than the dominant white Anglo-Celtic or "mainstream" were more conspicuous and therefore readily identified as different. By mainstream here, I borrow from Sue Shore's (2001) description of it as a kind of "mythical norm" that presents the dominant cultural group as the only acceptable norm. Of the sixteen teacher participants, eleven had Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, three Italian, one German and one Dutch. Such lack of cultural diversity among teaching staff means, as Santoro, Kamler and Reid (2001) argue, that the discursive practices within such schools tend to be situated around 'a monocultural, monolingual ("English-speaking") Anglo-Australian norm' (Santoro et al 2001, p. 191).

As observed in other locations, culturally stereotypical views intersect with gender for some APS teachers as they rationalise the learning practices of their students (Charlton et al. 2007). For Maria, Asian ethnicity equates with learning facility; ‘he was Asian so he caught on to the second [language] like learning Italian was pretty easy for him’(6, p. 5); Louise said, somewhat hesitantly, ‘sometimes you get able children but they’re really quiet - I don’t know if I can say – often Asian children are like that. I’ve got a couple of girls who are really bright but they’re really, really quiet – they will *not* offer anything – even in small group discussions’ (2, pp. 13-14). Identifying other students only by the generic term of “ESL” (English as a Second Language), Celeste, herself having an ESL background, is amazed by her students’ progress, calling it ‘unbelievably astounding’ (7, p. 6). Fleur recollects a situation in a neighbouring school where teachers flatly refused to accept the results of an IQ assessment. A Prep student of Greek origin, ‘who did very well on his IQ test, I mean kids can’t fake it [was] almost encouraged to be naughty ... to make him look bad ... and when I go to the school people say, “You said he was clever; he’s not really clever, he’s not doing any work”’ (8, p. 13). Thinking back on her work in a school for deaf children, the Assistant Principal recollected that:

There was a deaf child I taught who was a Vietnamese refugee – he’d come out on a boat and this is going back when it was really unusual ...his ability to learn English and being deaf ... but he picked that up brilliantly and he used to walk around with a dictionary the *whole* time and he would just [be] fascinated to learn and now if he hadn’t been hearing impaired I think he would have been so, so clever in a literary communication sort of way (5, p. 6; her emphasis).

The Principal’s first permanent teaching appointment was in a four teacher school in a rural region west of Geelong (12, p. 3). Acknowledging that he was an ambitious and career driven young teacher prepared to accept challenging professional appointments, he said:

[B]ecause I was keen to gain promotion I [then] put in a huge long list of schools and I gained my first promotion to GN Primary School. Now, that was in a very rugged Housing Commission area having up until that time taught only country children whom – if you occasionally had some discipline problems, but nothing like I met when I first came to this school in Melbourne because a lot of the families had moved out of the slums in C ... I found the girls far more difficult to sort of *manage* than the boys because the girls were just so *insolent* ... I had Grade 4 in the first year and they’d stand up and abuse you verbally and just be adamant that they weren’t going to do something ... I had two years there ... then was successful in having promotion

[after take leave and teaching in the UK] to PEPS, that mainly serviced a Housing Commission area, so again some of those children were quite difficult to handle and manage and you felt so sorry for them cos a lot of them did show *great* potential but because they weren't supported as home, you *knew* that those children would never have the opportunity to perhaps go on to further education, so it was quite a heartache seeing some of those who had potential which, I'm sure would never have been realised (12, pp.3-4).

These anecdotes suggest that during their careers, these APS teachers have experienced situations whereby their "taken for granted" assumptions have collided with practices that have been personally unsettling or confronting. The Principal feels entitled to deference from his students because of the professional status and power ascribed to his role of "The Teacher". Both he and other participants felt that certain populations of students should behave in a particular manner according to their classification as 'Asian', 'deaf', 'poor', 'girl' or a hybridisation of these within expected (and socially appropriate) gendered behaviours. Simultaneously, however, behaviours differing from these certainties elicit responses from the case study teachers of amazement, respect or at times compassion for students whom they believe are powerless and beholden to pre-ordained destinies as assigned by socio-economic status, disability or environment, but not gender.

As with Jeff, who is making a conscious effort to notice the impact of gender in his professional decisions, there are teachers who are not only sensitive to gender issues, but are also mindful of the impact that race, class and social-economic status have on the educational opportunities for all students, including the gifted. For example, Marjorie said:

A lot of children that I've seen – very gifted children – who did not have that financial backup probably just drifted off into early marriages and that sort of thing, like Greek girls I'm thinking of who just didn't have the family background or the knowledge or probably anyone in the family who even knew that their daughter had the skills or I'm thinking of a little ballet boy who was accepted by the Australian Ballet School, but he lived out of town and he just couldn't go every day on the tram going all that way into St. Kilda for his lessons and he had to drop out, so we lost him, but had he had a wealthy mother in Kew who could nip him into the city, he would have probably been dancing solo with the AB now (11, p. 22).

Marjorie's comments signal that a chink of transformational possibility exists, and that she personally strives for gender balance in selecting the students in the Challenges and Opportunities program (11, p. 14), yet although well intentioned, it is not sufficient. Merely being aware that gender, as well as

socio-economic status and/or race, can produce differential schooling outcomes does not mean that teachers have the capacity to actually translate such realisations into transformative practices. This is particularly so, if, as noted previously in Chapter Five, teachers such as Marjorie feel disempowered in their current work situation, a location where gender issues appear to be accorded minimal importance, and indeed, where an overt focus on gender issues may have unpredictable consequences due to it being at odds with the norms of her professional cohort. Such a situation, whilst not lessening individual concerns about gender, can have a stultifying effect on individual teacher's sense of capacity to make a difference. Thus, attempts to resolve biased gendered practices are conducted in relation to immediate, highly visible strategies such as ensuring headcounts are evenly balanced between girls and boys.

Good at language, good at maths: the gendered literacy/mathematical divide

The selection of students for gifted programs becomes increasingly problematic if those in power do not pause to reflect upon and examine their own gendered approaches to school practices, whether it is the challenge to find girls worthy of mathematical extension or the acceptance of the notion that boys have lesser capabilities in English. To follow Teese's (1997) argument, the bigger historical picture always needs to be critically examined before drawing any simplistic conclusions regarding beliefs about a variety of issues related to achievement and successful outcomes. It is too simplistic an approach, for example, to blame the impact of a so-called feminised teaching workforce – particularly within the primary school (Drudy 2008; Lucey 2001) – or to suggest that boys are experiencing failure because of girls or that school subjects have gendered designations.

Recognising the effect of other social aspects in educational opportunities, Teese proposes that the current gender achievement gap is elastic according to social class. He argues that boys from educationally advantaged backgrounds are sufficiently acculturated by, and equipped with English, to more than satisfactorily cope with schooling prior to pursuing 'male rich' (Teese 1997, p. 31) professional pathways within the sciences, engineering, business and

financial worlds. Teese (1997) further suggests that although overall girls perform well in English for the Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER), and boys dominate the lower levels, boys from professional backgrounds can expect to perform at the same ability level as the average girl which, therefore, does not situate them as disadvantaged compared to their peers of lower socio-economic status. Teese observes that about forty years ago, English and the humanities became the default domains and choices for girls and mathematics and the physical sciences for boys. When girls began to achieve high scores in English, the notion of it being a “girls’ subject” (Arnot et al. 1999) was reinforced. One consequence of successful social justice and gender equity policies with a focus on improving girls’ educational choices and opportunities was that claims began to emerge that girls are no longer disadvantaged. As the next section of my discussion will show, the Atlas Primary School case-study participants continue to adhere to the traditional notions that girls are “good” at English and boys are “good” at Maths, and further, that boys are the new educationally disadvantaged student. In turn, they promulgated teaching practices that reinforced these beliefs (see Gagné 1993). As Teese says,

[T]he academic hierarchy of subjects provides culturally advantaged children with the means of personal fulfilment and, underlying this, of conserving their social power. To culturally disadvantaged children, it offers gender stereotypes to compensate for the lack of personal fulfilment that they experience at school and the lack of social power on which this is based (Teese 1997, p. 31).

By collectively and individually embracing the prevailing orthodoxy regarding boys’ educational disadvantage, the staff at APS tended to not consciously reflect on the effects on students of their own gendered practices. In official documentation, numerous interviews and informal exchanges, the dominant discourse and repeated “regime of truth” was that boys’ educational needs should be given greater attention. The accompanying “truth” if perhaps one less explicitly stated, was that girls’ education and learning did not now require any special intervention because, as a group, girls were performing well educationally, and especially in the language arts and literacy domains. For example, although the APS School Charter 2000-2002 (p. 11), states that a pilot program to promote *Literacy for Boys* would be established, there was no suggestion to establish a comparable program with a focus on mathematics for girls, despite the stated aim that ‘APS aims to have all children achieve

appropriate levels of academic excellence and mastery of skills and knowledge, within the context of outcomes defined by CSF 11 with emphasis on English and Mathematics' (APS 2000-2002, p. 4).

It is now well established that during their primary and lower secondary school years, girls perform as well or better than boys in maths and science (Berube & Glanz 2008; Willis 1989). However, as with teachers observed elsewhere (see, for example Berube & Glanz 2008; Lee 2002), some teachers at Atlas Primary School continue to associate interest and competency in the arts and language with girls, and mathematics and sciences with boys. Maria said:

Girls tend to choose the dramatic and the poetry and the language type things whereas boys always go for the maths and the constructing. I mean girls like to construct but boys tend to pull out the LEGO® and the pattern blocks and the making. We have a "Making Box" in the room and the boys will always be doing those type of things, whereas the girls like going to the "The Writing Box" and getting the pretty pens and decorating their work. Occasionally you'll have the opposite whereas there's girls that just want to make things also. So, it is different. Between boys and girls, very different [because] our brains are different (6, p. 12).

Ruth, drawing on more than 40 years of classroom teaching experience, reflects that 'the girls on the *whole* tended to be keener readers and have more interest and internalised opinions about what they've been reading' (15, p. 21; her emphasis). Taking a social constructivist approach to gender, Marjorie feels

girls tend though, I've found, to show more in the language skills than perhaps in mathematics or science – all the girls I've had over the years have always been linguistically able and that they write fluently and they are able to express themselves verbally and in written form, creatively or say in journal writing ... possibly because I think because girls are expected to show skill linguistically and so they respond to that; girls tend to be around their mother more so they hear more conversation with older women or with women – they prefer I think, to sit and chat – that's more of a social female thing (11, p. 14)

The Assistant Principal reinforcing a binary gendered approach to capability in language or mathematical domains states that 'we've got lots of girls that are good, they're probably arguably better at literacy than boys, but mathematically we don't [as a] cohort have them, *but* I do know of one gifted girl mathematically that doesn't come to this school, so they do exist' (5, p. 19; her emphasis). Moreover, the Assistant Principal notes that an equal number of highly able girls and boys were chosen for the school's Challenges and Opportunities program - which included a maths focus - but presumes that

girls just do not have the “extra” capability to be selected for the math’s acceleration program as they simply are not outstanding enough. This rather “cut and dried” approach firmly shuts out any internal investigations into reasons why girls are not nominated for acceleration in mathematics yet attend the C&O program. Potential explanations range from teachers underestimating girls’ mathematical capabilities (Davis & Rimm 2004; Pinker 2008) to the influence of social norms and peer pressure or self-perception related to mathematical ability (see Davis & Rimm 2004; Kerr 1996; Porter 2005; Willis 1989). Yet, such significant gender issues were summarily dismissed as of relatively minor concern, with the sense of being “dealt with” by the seemingly inclusive action of ensuring that equal numbers of girls and boys attend the C&O program. The Assistant Principal said:

The children that go to the Challenge and Opportunities Program there would be equal numbers of boys and girls that go to that, but I guess with the two boys Maths thing nobody stood out as being not being catered for within the classroom extension things so it's not a gender thing, it's- and if a girl stood out like that she would get exactly the same treatment in that sense (5, pp. 25-26)

Tamsin elaborates, suggesting that girls, unlike the boys, wish to fully explore a broader diversity of experiences and domains before focussing on a particular specialisation.

I think in maths the boys do tend to dominate it. Whether it's to do with conditioning as a child, where they've been playing with more tactile kinaesthetic things and visuals and they've got a better visual spatial *pattern*, but boys *tend* to be better at maths and that's not hard and fast but I know that the top boys in my room that did the University of Canberra maths problem solving challenge - the girls could only pick at a few problems that were patterns and they were a little disappointing I must say, but the boys *really* love getting their teeth into the problems and are loving the challenge ... well they *say* in Year Twelve that the girls are doing particularly well, so maybe they overcome that play pattern [deficit] that they've had, the visual-spatial things the boys [have]. The girls, they catch up ... over the years all the mathematically talented students, they're pretty well all been [boys. There have] been odd girls, but more than likely they've been boys ... [For the maths extension cohort for next year] I'm scratching to find a girl and I know she won't be in the same league and I mean we've pushed them into this other one just to get gender equity, but they certainly didn't have the commitment or the thirst to do it or the drive and the focus that the boys had was interesting. I think probably Science is a little bit the same way. We had a “Girls in Science Day” and they quite liked it but they - I don't know what it is, they [would] rather be more generalist. I think a lot of the girls, they want to have their finger in *lots* of pies, bit of this and a bit of that and maybe they're more balanced and less [convergent]. I hate to say it but I think there is a difference. I think probably, generally, they're more focused on school, more involved, more interested but the boys are, are more channelled. And it could be a social thing because they're all feeding off each other too, and they're [influencing each others' choices saying], “This is what we'll do.” ... I've no idea on that one ... I mean it's very easy to categorise but I certainly have girls that are strong in Maths but they *can't* be pushed

to persevere the way that the boys can ... they're quite happy to stand out in language or in other things' (9, pp. 7-8; her emphasis)

Teachers appear either blinkered to girls' mathematical abilities or take for granted their current level of performance. There are grave implications for teaching practice and for gender equity if experts in the field of gifted education, such as Gross (Quek 2003), downplay the salience of gendered perceptions in the selection process for radical acceleration programs in schools. The gendered literacy/mathematical divide also has repercussions for boys whose interests might not be sustained by the latter domain yet feel coerced to focus less upon subjects such as English; a subject traditionally considered not only *for* girls but a subject associated as "female" (see, for example, Delisle 1998). The habitual practice of associating actual curriculum subjects with a particular "gender" (for example, technology as male or design as female), has power implications at all levels, ranging from the subject's perceived significance among students, or its ranked value as part of a tertiary entry score through to the status accorded to the teacher of the subject (Paechter 2000). It suggests that although knowledge and power are distributed within the state school system premised on the basis of equality of opportunity, the manner in which values are assigned to individual curriculum subjects reinforces a discourse of inequity. It further strengthens both the persistence of conventional gender norms and teachers' professional commonsense regarding how girls and boys learn and at what they excel. These beliefs – about gender, about curriculum, about learning – constitute regimes of truth that both shape teachers' and students' experiences of school and classrooms, and in turn feed into wider socio-cultural discourses regarding gender differences.

Boys dominate and so get noticed

Boys not only dominate indoor and outdoor spaces in the school environment, they also monopolise teacher time. Teachers pay greater heed to boys in both positive and negative ways. For example, boys are admonished more frequently for bad behaviour and praised for academic capability, whereas girls are scolded for poor academic performance and praised for personal appearance, conformity and neatness (Francis & Skelton 2001; Measor & Sikes 1992; Robertson 1992; Thorne 1993). Ruth considers that 'bright boys

are often more aggressive and a bit more annoying' (15 p. 10). She recollected that when

Jxxx was a little boy his - one of the teachers used to sit him under the table because he was such a pest until they let him go up to grade, you know, the next grade to do maths and then he was a bit more interested, so I think sometimes boys can dominate the teacher's time more by their behaviour but it's certainly not always the case (15, p. 10).

Compliance by girls is perceived by some APS teachers as a valuable attribute because it facilitates classroom management and therefore teaching. Ruth believes that '[I]t's much easier to respond to the quiet little girl who gets on and does as she is told than to the boy who might annoy you' (15, p. 10). Similarly, Helen says of her Picasso Group⁵² 'the balance has been mostly girls because I was looking to make my process easier and ... they're easier to work with ... the boys maintain a constant pull' (4b, p. 14). For Eric, 'in general girls are easier to teach because they tend to be more enthusiastic about ... *academic* kinds of things ... boys are more physically active' (16, p. 32; his emphasis). Both the Principal (12, p. 19) and the Assistant Principal observe girls' application and diligence. The Assistant Principal suggests that these differences are due to influences from their respective peer groups. For girls, this is exemplified by fastidious attention to completing or embellishing work tasks:

Some girls innately like to get things done really well and dot the Is and cross the Ts and spend hours doing colouring and all that sort of stuff and really put their ultimate thoughts into it and if they're in a peer group that do that then they keep building on that. I don't think boy peer groups, as a generalisation, have those goals (5, p. 19).

Such characterisations of gendered behaviours reinforce cultural norms of girls as diligent and hard working, even a bit fastidious about things that do not matter so much, such as colouring in or making pretty borders. A description of girls as industrious and independent but also reliable and obedient also links with, and strengthens, longstanding cultural truths about femininity as more passive and meeker than masculinity. Whilst they are "good" students, girls tend not to be represented as "risk-takers" or adventurous thinkers, arguably seen as more of the hallmark of the "gifted" child. In contrast, boys' behaviour

⁵² The "Picasso Group" is an extension group for capable Visual Arts students. Helen says 'it's not a gifted program. I'm not the gifted teacher. I am just filling in the odd hour here and there with a group of children and justifying that hour off [when classes timetabled for Visual Arts attend the swimming program]' (4b, p. 15).

is typically described as more exuberant, and even this is often given a positive inflection as a sign of boundary-testing and adventurous conduct (see Walkerdine 1984). Such stereotypical perceptions of girls and boys is what Charlton et al. (2007) claim leads to the sacrificial use of girls to moderate boys' behaviour and so address the educational needs of boys

Teachers tend to seek formal, accredited confirmation of their suspicions when they sense that badly behaved or disruptive behaviour might be masking psychological problems. Boys are more frequently referred for evaluation than girls at a ratio of 3:1 (Bochove 2007), even though the Principal thinks that 'they were just p'raps naughty children' (12, p. 23) possibly signalling his disquiet of childhood behavioural differences becoming increasingly medicalised (Hume 2007). However, both troubled girls and boys often score highly enough in formal assessments to be considered in the gifted range, their difficulties or underachievement masking a gift or capability in another area (Baldwin & Vialle 1999; Gross 1998; Hoover-Schultz 2005). Fleur recollected working with

one extremely bright girl here, who wasn't so good at spelling, [who] was reluctant to produce the written work and was really quite high IQ - a hundred and forty. Not really standing out, underachieving, because of the poor spelling, and parents were judging her work purely on her spelling ability, "No, she's not a capable student, she needs *remedial* help", and that's why she was referred to me. Because she was in Grade Six it was discussion about appropriate secondary programs and encouragement for the parents to look at schools that had some sort of acceleration programme. She was extremely capable in maths also, her maths reasoning was excellent as well as some sort of support for the spelling, 'cause that was what they were still focused on, was the spelling ... It certainly seems sad that her whole work output was being judged on her spelling so that the rest of her capabilities were glossed over or cancelled out (8, p. 5).

Fleur explains, 'the referrals generally aren't because kids are very capable and people wonder what to do with them, it's because there's a concern about the child being withdrawn or not happy or acting out' (8, p. 13).

Yet APS teachers only spoke of, and associated boys, with disorderly behaviours, as exemplified by Louise speaking of 'a naughty boy [who] tried to hide his talents' (2, p. 4) or Janet's observation about one of her students who

could become a bit disruptive and attention seeking ... at the beginning of the year because he was, I s'pose because he wanted to let me know that he knew quite a few things, he wanted to get the other children's attention maybe it could have been

boredom, at the beginning of the year until I worked out just where he was coming from and what he knew and what he didn't know ... and wanting to be accepted too I think, he tried and say smart things and which he thought would get the children's acceptance, be funny and humour [which had the opposite effect] which often happens with children like that (10, pp. 9-10)

Although, as noted previously in this chapter, teachers' classroom time is unequally distributed in favour of the boys, some teachers at APS consciously attempt to redress the imbalance by striving for an equitable approach to girls in their care. Louise attempts to ensure that the girls in her classroom can be heard:

They're very dominant boys and very competitive boys ... I try to actually make sure they do [get a voice] so they're not swallowed up. It's just a matter of I guess, just the teacher managing a class well enough so that the boys – the girls [*laughs at the slip of her tongue*] get their time as well (2, p. 15).

And Marjorie endeavours to balance gender numbers: 'I've always tried to send both boys and girls to C&O but I notice that there's a preponderance of boys down there at the moment and very few girls. The girls who are down there are girls from my class' (11, p. 14). Eric too, perhaps motivated by concerns of criticism or accusations of gender bias, even if genuinely concerned for gender based equality of opportunity, selects equal numbers of girls and boys for the C&O program, because

if you choose three boys and then only one girl however valid it might be for other reasons ... then you're really leaving yourself open about being biased towards the boys or biased towards the girls 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 (16, p. 5).

It was not clear upon what basis these teachers made their decisions regarding student selection but it appears to be an artificial gender-balanced approach rather than one based on merit (Charlton et al. 2007).

Teachers' gendered conceptions of giftedness

Boys are conspicuous

Gifted girls at Atlas Primary School remained obscured to more than half the case-study participants, a phenomenon that reflects Lee's (2000) observation that teachers in her study chose to discuss gifted boys more than gifted girls. Despite valiant social justice endeavours by Louise to give girls a voice, or efforts by Jeff to remain gender neutral or Marjorie's aim to balance the sexes

participating in the C&O program, girls appeared to be out of the spotlight when teachers considered and discussed their gifted and talented students.

Gifted boys were more conspicuous to teachers when they recounted involvements with highly able students. Eric felt that '[s]ome of the brightest kids that I have taught have been boys (16, p. 37); Melanie noted that '[a]fter the *Bright Futures* was when I got the child [boy] in my class that I classed as gifted, the only child I've ever had' (3, p. 12); Celeste said, 'I can think of one particular boy who's very gifted with his reading' (7, p. 8); Fleur commented on Michael 'who came already sort of stamped and labelled, "Very capable in maths"' (8, p. 4) as did the Principal who noted that '[t]here's a particularly talented lad in Maths' (12, p. 19), whilst Ruth pondered over the very shy Nathaniel saying, 'he was a very quiet boy and yet he was extremely gifted, I think. He knew a lot more about maths than I did and that was only in Grade Four' (15, p. 10). Louise has 'one boy that I would put into that [gifted] category' (2, p. 3). Although the case-study participants might be concerned about gender equity, they still chose to discuss boys when asked about gifted children. Whether teachers deliberately or unconsciously privilege boys, the consequences are similar, with girls' capabilities and talents being less well recognised. The question must be asked: What are the educational and equity consequences if teachers, even inadvertently, nurture and privilege gifted boys in their classrooms and so continue to ignore gifted girls?

Gifted girls stay hidden

If pre-service teachers hold poor attitudes towards diligent, studious and gifted girls, as Carrington and Bailey (2000) found in their NSW study, then how do practising teachers view gifted girls – if they notice them at all? As I have argued above (also see Chapter Six), teachers – and it appears to be a global phenomenon – have a propensity to identify gifted boys more so than gifted girls (Endepohis-Ulpe 2008; Gagné 1993; Lee 2002, 2000). Certain defining characteristics are said to be possessed by gifted students (see for example, DoE Victoria 1996, pp. 53-57). Although such lists are extensive, the most common general characteristics include: avid interests; rapid learning ability; interest in the unusual; high intrinsic motivation; creative thinking ability; self-

confidence; a preference for independent work; high energy levels; tendencies to be curious, venturesome and resourceful plus a propensity to be bored with the more mundane. However, for the teachers at APS, such characteristics are clouded or masked by gender. As noted previously, the Assistant Principal recognises the existence of ‘girls that are good’ (5, p. 18). When asked if gifted girls were to be found at APS, the Principal replied in a like manner: ‘Oh, there certainly are I’m sure – they haven’t come to my attention as much’ (12, p.19). Yet, despite his own vagueness as well as ignoring his own advice, the Principal believes his teaching staff must move beyond the immediate distractions of boys’ dominance and read the clues as signalled by girls’ behaviour to more fully understand their capabilities. The Principal is of the view that boys come to the attention of teachers because

the girls perhaps aren’t as vocal as the boys. The boys are certainly – I can see why there is some argument for single sex schools because boys do certainly make themselves heard and often because of their behaviour demanding of your attention more, whereas the girls, you really have to listen carefully and watch their responses and gauge their work before you realise perhaps “Oh, there’s a real talent here” ... the girls tended to [be] more introverted and perhaps *don’t* want to share what their real ability is with you (12, pp. 23-24).

But when asked about gifted girls at APS, overall, the APS case study participants concur with the Principal’s observation that there are no gifted girls at APS. Maria, a comparatively recent graduate in the APS cohort (6 years teaching), specifically speaking of girls said, ‘No, I wouldn’t say ... oh, well, no, I could say there was you know, bright children, but I wouldn’t say they’re gifted. No.’ (6, p. 13). Her vacillating response perhaps signals a dilemma with the use of the word “gifted”. Likewise, Jeff sees *smart* girls (1, p. 4) and Fleur sees *bright and capable* girls (8, p. 4; p. 11) whilst Louise considers one of her girls as *bright rather than gifted* (2, p. 11). Melanie feels that

[t]here’ve been strong girls but not that I would class as gifted, talented ... coming in with ... ability and knowledge and whatever on the par with everyone else and then reaching a high level by the end of the year, but not like you’d go, “Where are they getting it from?” you know? Not that sort of level, I haven’t had any girls like that (3, p. 13).

Pondering the existence of gifted girls, some such as Janet, take a cautious, conditional approach, simultaneously reiterating some conventional gendered associations that allow women and girls to excel in certain areas, such as the

creative arts: ‘there'd probably be a gifted girl in drawing. I've never seen a child draw so well at such a young age. Now she gets the opportunity to go to special art classes with Helen’ (10, p. 12). But Judith seems to suggest that prowess in the arts does not warrant being termed gifted:

Actually no [girls come to mind] I have girls that are in the category I think of talented, but no girls that I've actually come across that I thought are in that category that I've actually taught. I've had occasion for some children who have been learning musical instruments; I have a little girl that – she's now in Grade 2 that I taught, who was in Prep who plays the violin, who is outstanding musically but in the classroom only presents at being talented - talented and at more advanced than the grade but certainly not gifted (13, p. 10).

Celeste considers that all of her students are gifted, but particularly her compliant class helper (see previous discussion in this chapter). In these examples, we see not only the ambivalence about, but also a reluctance to recognise giftedness in girls. When girls are identified as having special skills and talents, the language employed to describe them is relatively cautious and qualified. Moreover, girls' talents were typically aligned with conventionally feminine curriculum areas and activities – drawing, music and language. And there appears to be somewhat of an element of surprise in the teachers' descriptions of the girls, as if they are conveying a quite uncommon phenomenon. In contrast, the teachers' descriptions of gifted boys were both more fulsome and conveyed more of a sense that the gifted boys, while exceptional students, were nevertheless within familiar norms.

Gifted girls can remain hidden from teachers on the girls' own volition. As the Principal observed, girls, rather than drawing attention to themselves, can choose to remain silent and out of the teacher's gaze (see, for example, Bell 1989; Jacob Ryan 1999; Reis 2002). Marjorie considers that ‘girls keep their abilities under bushes [sic] – their light under the bushel’ (11, p. 14). As Kerr observes (1996, 1985) gifted girls know how to “play the game” and some even deliberately underachieve. Fleur states:

I've come across some girls in this school who were extremely capable in senior classes, who were disguising their ability, not volunteering, not putting themselves forward in class, didn't want to look like know-alls, putting themselves forward in class, certainly I would say, underachieving and there was some sort of feeling from the teachers like, “Oh, no you're wrong! This isn't a very capable student. She never puts her hand up. ... didn't want to look smart (8, p. 4).

Although Fleur believes that personality might play a part in girls wishing to remain hidden, she also suggests that girls don't 'want to look smart' because 'cleverness in girls isn't valued or there seems to be a bit of difference with boys' (8, p. 5). Marjorie agrees that girls deliberately mask their abilities, but it is because of learned, conforming, gendered behaviours and strong peer group influences (Brewster 1988; Gilligan 1982/1993; Jacob Ryan 1999; Reis 2001). We see here in Marjorie's reflections the power of gender norms absorbed by girls at a young age, and how they are played out in classrooms and in learning styles. Keeping things hidden, not showing off, being modest, a concern with image and appearance – these are well-documented themes in research on gender and gender identity construction (Francis & Skelton 2001; Hey 1997).

I think its modesty. It's a kind of reinforced modesty that girls don't show off and "keep themselves nice" [*chuckles*] it's I also think because they understand the power of bullying and of put-down and of verbal comment. If you are showing yourself off in any kind of way at all – even by wearing a bigger bow or more hair clips or anything at all that just takes you slightly out of what is, "Today we are all wearing this. Anyone who is wearing that is out". And they are aware of these little parameters, so they keep themselves within those, so that they're still friends and everyone around them is liked by them and they are likeable to the other girls but without extending too much to show themselves off. They keep it more private. One girl I'm thinking of writes her own journal at home, keeps her own story writing and a lot of those sorts of things are a home job. She shows up very strongly in class as being a good writer as well but she does extend herself and have a lot more to say for herself at home both in conversation and in written work (11, p. 14).

The qualities of "modesty", of being "private", of not "showing off" are consistent with the descriptions discussed above regarding girls as hard-working and diligent. While these echo older norms of femininity, what is surprising is how much currency they appear to still have. Girls, it appears, can be clever so long as they do not over step the mark, and stay conscientious, nice and not too extreme. One may well ask: Whose *Bright Futures* are we teaching towards?

The educational psychologist associated with APS categorically stated that gifted girls were indeed to be found at APS, but she observed that they were referred to her not for their giftedness, but rather for social-emotional problems, generally exacerbated by a lack of self-esteem. Fleur reflects:

There are [gifted] girls here, yes. And they certainly haven't been referred to me because they're seen as gifted. So, for example, a couple were referred for being depressed. Yes, [they were] I would think [depressed according to assessment]. One was threatening to harm herself - family circumstances, but also, I think, her lack of self esteem. She felt that she was different and had difficulty in maintaining

friendship links and girls around the age that she was, around Grade Five, get very cliquey and quite bitchy and she had real trouble maintaining friendship links because she wasn't bitchy and cliquey ... 133 [on the] WISC IQ test (8, p. 9).

Some researchers (for example, Jacob Ryan 1999) believe that gifted girls are especially “at risk” or emotionally unstable because of the mixed messages sent by family, peers, teachers and society in general which advocates “excellence”. But for girls, the pursuit of excellence is to be tempered or modified, dressed up in a physically attractive and feminine package, but not so that it is better than “all the others”. There is inconclusive research evidence on whether gifted children are more at risk of depression or mental health issues (Neihart 2002), with Freeman (2005, p. 85) arguing that gifted students are ‘at least as well-balanced as any others’. My main point here, however, is not whether gifted students as a group are more or less emotionally stable than other groups of students. Rather, the purpose of these comments has been to point to some of the contexts and mixed messages that girls encounter – in schools, in classrooms, in the wider society – in regard to being a “bright girl”, and the consequences this might have for their learning and for their sense of self-identity.

Conclusion

I mean with girls, I've heard of people who've said that sort of thing [you can make a difference] to girls and I've spoken to parents who've had girls said that sort of thing, “You'll make a difference”, but then, the girls – for what however it's been said, girls have picked up that then to be a mum and be a mum at home with children is belittling for them, and so that I think it needs to be particularly carefully handled for girls, so that they don't feel it's good to be that or that, and that if they opt to take motherhood strand for a while, then that's not wrong or bad, they haven't let society down by [not] staying in the career strand, yeah, so yeah, I mean it's very tricky and I think with gifted kids I mean they always say and you do, “Every child's an individual,” and you look and treat them as individuals but you can't generalise for gifted children and everyone will have to be handled as an individual and what might be good for one, whether it be accelerating or whatever might be a disaster for another one (2, p. 33).

In terms of educational policy reform, some regard generalisations about the gender gap in educational achievement as misleading (Hammersley 2001) with gender equity for girls as having been “done”, its goals achieved, or no longer as urgent as once considered, despite evidence to the contrary particularly in developing countries (see, for example, USAID 2008) But, for many schools, as Hargreaves and Fullan (1995) have suggested, gender issues are often

regarded as relatively minor concerns for staff development. However, as my analysis in this chapter suggests, such views are both ill-placed and unjustified. The need to work towards gender equity for girls remains a significant goal, even if the pressing issues have changed from the 1970s when equal opportunity and access were the primary focus. In my study, gender equity issues were in part to do with access to programs, but also and importantly to do with the persistence and effects of deeply-held personal beliefs and professional common-sense – the dominant discourses and regimes of truth through which the gifted child was understood, constructed and taught. The norm of the gifted child, as I have argued, was male, with gifted girls either not fully recognised or cautiously described as “bright”, or “clever”, but not really gifted.

Paradoxically, at Atlas Primary School, while the “new masculinity” discourse has become institutionalised, with girls constructed as high achievers and boys as the new “disadvantage”, teachers appeared to struggle with recognising gifted girls, and steadfastly refused to grant highly able girls the equivalent status of highly able boys. As I have argued, despite girls being generally seen as high achievers, they are marginalised or not even noticed for gifted programs. Giftedness, therefore, is not only a social construct but one that is also gendered in that the qualities of the “gifted child” are more aligned with masculinity than femininity. Perhaps, for the APS community, the very characteristics of giftedness are associated only with males, thus constituting the actual construct of “gifted” as masculine. Such a construction is also aligned with a longer cultural and curriculum history of positioning the “hard” subjects of maths and sciences as male, as it is success and excellence in these curriculum areas, rather than in the “feminine” subjects of the arts, which is widely regarded as the true indicator of giftedness. Thus, a struggle continues to recognise and attend to gifted girls as an “educationally disadvantaged subject”. Although Jackson (1998) suggests that the disadvantage discourse should focus on developing gender fairness across all curriculum domains and educational practices rather than oscillating between dichotomised and confrontational “girls versus boys” models, the experiences of girls at Atlas Primary School indicates that there is a clear need to refocus on gender to

maintain an awareness of school policy and teacher practices to ensure that *all* students are given the equality of opportunity to promote excellence in learning.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

In this concluding chapter I firstly review the scope, focus and argument of the preceding chapters. I then bring together the overall themes and analyses and discuss a number of key ideas and arguments. Finally, I link the understandings and knowledge generated in this thesis to future, positive directions to teachers' work and education that have possible implications beyond my specific focus on gifted children.

Chapter One contextualised the thesis within the tensions over the meaning and enactment of a gifted education “policy” for the Australian state of Victoria, grounded in the specific time, politics and policies governing Victorian education. The research setting was described, positioning my particular personal perspectives within the educational policies and concerns of the period. A key focus was the disjuncture between the notion of nurturing excellence in students by contrast with the pervasive ethos of Australian egalitarianism and anti-elitism. This is an overall theme within the thesis and in this chapter I mapped some of the contexts for this. The other important focus of this thesis, introduced in Chapter One, is to present an understanding of “top-down” gifted policy and professional development enactments and what this means for both an analysis of, and practice within the classrooms of one specific school.

Chapter Two provided a selective review of the key debates, issues and arguments of the extensive literature related to intelligence, the measurement of intelligence and as a consequence, the conceptual construct of giftedness and, importantly, the missing component in most discussions related to gifted education, that of the aetiology of the meaning of giftedness, as recognised by Leslie Margolin in 1994 (p. xiii). The literature investigation located my work within the historical context of the field and particularly emphasised how the notion of intelligence was appropriated by many to serve a wider social and political agenda (such as the eugenics movement) framed by race, class and

cultural differences, which, in turn, influenced educational developments in the Western world and the developing nation of Australia.

Chapter Three outlined the conceptual and methodological framework that supports this thesis. It is divided into three sections. In the first section I argued that by utilising a single case, case study approach, deep insights into teacher practice are afforded because of the holistic perspective achieved by a particular group of teachers as they explained how, from their personal experience and perceptual framework perspectives, they dealt with specific problems and events related to the *Bright Futures* gifted policy development. In the second section, I discussed how my engagement with post-structural Foucauldian and feminist themes led to a conceptual positioning which provided insights into the world of teachers' practice. The principal themes selected were discourses and regimes of truth, normalisation and the classification of populations and, surveillance/self surveillance. These "tools" examined concerns with gender differentiation and inequality. In the third section, I outlined my research design method and the specific research processes used for gathering data. This section also discussed the necessary legal requirements as well as the ethical considerations which enabled me to conduct my research in my former workplace with an insider-outsider perspective.

Chapter Four, with its specific focus on the historical and political developments that forged a compulsory, free and secular education in Australia, with a particular emphasis on the state of Victoria, is both a supporting rampart to Chapter Two and provides the historical and political context for the case-study. Chapter Four, by building on the (Western) global advancements related to gifted education, provided a discussion on the egalitarian notions of social justice and equal opportunity which made a stark contrast to the New Right ideologies that underpinned the *Schools of the Future* and the introduction in 1995 of Victoria's first gifted education policy known as *Bright Futures*. Thus, Chapter Four contextualises the concerns surrounding the contemporary discourses and policies on gifted education in

the context of Victorian politics of the period, but also their historical antecedents.

Chapter Five moved from the “bigger picture” policy discussions in Chapter Four to one particular primary school in Melbourne; the single case, case study site. In this chapter, I examined the ethos of excellence acculturated by the school and some of the disjunctions that arose between professional knowledge and work and, professional development and teacher practices. In the first explanatory section I described the school, the case study participants and the general expectations held by the community. I then discussed teachers’ work in general before moving to a more extensive discussion which related to teachers’ professional learning and development. This discussion embraced both the macro expectations required by the education department and curriculum authorities as well as the expectations of Atlas Primary School community comprising teachers, parents, administrators and the managerial staff.

Chapter Six builds upon the analyses of Chapter Five and specifically discusses the *Bright Futures* Professional Development (BFPD) program and its implications for gifted education as enacted within the case study site. In the first section, I explained the requirements of the BFPD and how “top-down” models of teachers’ professional development can meet with teacher resistance, even by those who are overtly compliant with the professional development agenda. The second section attended to the relationship of teachers’ personal beliefs and professional knowledge, with a particular focus upon the notions of giftedness, the gifted child and gifted education. In the third section, I presented the case study participants understanding of the *Bright Futures* Professional Development four years after participation, and juxtaposed their perceptions and experiences with those relating to the earlier and concurrent Challenges and Opportunities withdrawal program offered by APS, as well as school and classroom practices that might be directly linked to the BFPD, such as the acceleration of gifted students.

Chapter Seven examined both the school practices and the case study participants' responses to the *Bright Futures* gifted policy in the context of gender. I argued that despite past efforts of the Commonwealth Schools Commission (1975) and the Gender Equity Taskforce (1997) to promote equitable gender awareness and practices, school documentation, policies and the teachers in the case study continue to favour boys. Gifted boys are recognised by teachers but gifted girls are marginalised as teachers remain blinkered to their presence. For a school that has an ethos of excellence and claims to provide equality of opportunity for all, this situation is unacceptable and creates a real concern for girls. Thus, my initial observations and concerns related to the gender imbalance of students selected for gifted programs whilst working as the Challenges and Opportunities teacher in the case study site remain unresolved.

I now discuss the key arguments and ideas that emerge from the overall thesis, the purpose of which is to present my understandings of teacher practices related to the *Bright Futures* gifted education policy and associated professional development as drawn from the insights provided through my research.

Implications for practice

As noted in Chapter Six, the linchpin for the success or otherwise at the school level of mandated education policy such as the *Bright Futures* is the principal. Accepting that gender is a critical formative parameter in shaping our lives, I suggest that a good principal is well versed in gender research and, as such, is familiar with the current literature on gender. The importance of developing an awareness of gendered practices by the principal cannot be overestimated as it impacts on every aspect within the world of teachers' work, including policy directives, curriculum, curriculum choices and how teachers recognise and nurture potential talents for both girls and boys. The principal must understand not only the dominant socio-cultural mores governing gender (such as associating "good girls" with conformity and compliance) but also provide the leadership to positively influence how these choices are played out and represented within the entire school community. The strong discipline and

control held by the male principal might well have prevented the more gender-aware case study participants from making any overt efforts to transform biased gendered behaviours within the school, resorting to modification by ‘stealth’ (Kenway et al. 1998, p. 209).

Closely allied with this notion is that of the formation and shaping of teachers’ beliefs. I argued that as both the Principal and the Assistant Principal remained convinced in their belief that there are only bright and not gifted girls at Atlas Primary School (notwithstanding the ethos valuing excellence in the school), they then convey this notion, perhaps unwittingly, to their teachers. Thus, there is no incentive for teachers to learn how to recognise the characteristics and manifestations of giftedness in girls and to then promote their educational development. Such a situation is a form of tacit (and perhaps complicit) academic oppression to the detriment of girls.

In addition to this “blind spot” which APS teachers seemed to exhibit with respect to identification of gifted girls, the total number of students which APS teachers identified as gifted was greatly below that which would have been expected based on general population studies (Gagné 2003a; Renzulli & Reis 2003). That only one boy was considered gifted by the school community also suggests that the education of unidentified gifted boys is being compromised. Yet this summation sits in opposition to those teachers at APS who are more conscious of shifts in gender roles and strive towards equal opportunity within the classroom, whether it be the right for girls to have a voice, access the computer or play certain sports in equal measure to the boys. Similarly, teachers defended the rights of boys to select school items or play games that traversed the realm of the opposite sex. Despite such awareness by individual teachers, APS remains more “boy friendly” than “equal”. A first step to rectify such an imbalance is to recognise and discuss the socio-environmental influences on gender issues before determining ways to genuinely alter the systemic practices that mask girls’ abilities and/or reinforce the appropriateness and desirability of compliant performance by girls solely for the benefit of teachers and classroom management. I believe that it would also be of interest to examine whether or not teachers have children of their own,

and whether the gender of those children has a bearing on the gendered beliefs that teachers hold about the type and degree of students' ability.

Teachers' principles related to the philosophy of teaching and learning also affect whether or not they accept the notion of giftedness. As a social construct, the word "gifted" is value laden. Although I concur with Ruth Cigman (2006) that it is merely a word doing a particular task, it is reductionist in the sense that the subtleties and differences between highly capable students with varying potentialities and across many domains is lost. Researchers in the field of gifted education continue to debate the terms "gifted and talented" and this is mirrored by the teachers at APS, which perhaps explains why at APS only one (ESL) boy was considered gifted and that his gift was in the domain of mathematics. As researchers (see for example, Borland 2005, 2003b, 2003c, 1997; Margolin 1994, 1993; Sapon-Shevin 1994, 1993) have suggested, it might be best to dispense with the word and the construct altogether. I propose that whilst this is an admirable notion, we must not "throw the baby out with the bath water". Firstly, there must be recognition that there will always be a cohort of students performing at "above average". Secondly, to address the needs of highly capable students there must be genuine curriculum differentiation offered in schools with a flexibility allowing students to work with those performing at a similar cognitive level. This would require a third consideration - a social change within the current school culture and practises to accept mixed-age classes allowing for fluidity in class composition according to ability and curriculum domains. My suggestions are an echo of suggestions for varying forms of appropriate differentiated provision (see, for example Betts 1997, 1986; Braggett 1996a, 1996b; Renzulli 2005; Renzulli & Reis 1997, 1994, 1993; VanTassel-Baska 2003); however, generally, current Victorian educational culture and school organisational practices have yet to change.

Schools, and those who govern and manage schools, need to dispense with the "lock-step-age-grade-promotion" and relinquish long held and cherished notions that students must forever be grouped according to their age for reasons of social-emotional development. Truly then we might see an

egalitarian educational system that permits an equality of opportunity for all commensurate with individual abilities to accommodate advanced learning. If “real” differentiation occurred in *all* schools then Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) programs and schools might well become redundant and so alleviate the concerns, firmly held by teachers whom I interviewed and the broader community, that SEAL schools are elitist.

For the teachers participating in this case-study, their engagement in the *Bright Futures* professional development program did not serve to alleviate the confusion surrounding the terminology utilised by the domain of gifted education. Unlike other Australian states, many of which adopted the Gagné (1985) approach to the words “gift” and “talent”, Victoria shied away from adopting a definitional standpoint. Thus no shared basis existed from which to commence discussions and debates; rather it served to foster the ambiguity and lack of accord surrounding the concept and, for many teachers, served to reinforce their opposition to both the concept and associated practices. Rather than unsettling deeply entrenched beliefs relating to gifted education, the enactment of a “top-down” professional development model only served to cement these views and did little to promote the value of overtly addressing the needs of highly able students. Whilst the *Bright Futures* gifted education policy and professional development did highlight the real educational needs of a particular group of students and permitted APS to facilitate an acceleration program for at least one student, it was with the teachers, already convinced that gifted students both existed and required attention that the BFPD made most sense. For these teachers, the program was met with enthusiasm. For the teachers who remained confused or unconvinced about the gifted construct, the educational needs of gifted students and the BFPD, it was easier to refute both the construct and the existence of gifted students. The entire *Bright Futures* movement became inexorably linked with the feeling that again, as teachers, they were being “done to” by faceless bureaucrats with nothing better to do than meddle in their professional lives and practices. Professional intuition regarding differences in both ability and gender remained the default position for the case-study participants. The “train-the-trainer” model did not resonate for many participants and the Victorian

Directorate of Education might have been more successful implementing the BFPD with a more “grass roots” approach in the form of action learning or action research. This signals that continued investigations into the most appropriate ways to foster teachers’ on-going professional learning is necessary.

Within a school such as Atlas Primary School, with its ethos of excellence and an ability to provide not only a comprehensive curriculum but a plethora of enrichment programs and activities expected by a community that values and demands a quality education, then a policy initiative such as *Bright Futures* did little more than provide an unwarranted sense of comfort to the school community by seemingly endorsing the status quo of the teaching and learning practices at Atlas Primary School. However, it did not resolve issues of identification and selection of students considered suitable candidates for gifted programs.

Future research

During the course of researching this thesis, it became evident that there is more to learn about the periods prior to and after the *Bright Futures*. There is a need for comprehensive study of the history of gifted education in Victorian state education up to the present. This would build upon and update Eddie Braggett’s (1985) comprehensive book, the work of Comerford and Creed (1981), Peter Wilson’s (1996) publication and the two Senate (2001; 1988) enquiries regarding the education of gifted and talented children in Australia in general. There exists however, a void in Victoria-specific literature. There is much knowledge concerning the *Bright Futures* policy initiative but it is knowledge that remains privy only to the participants involved in creating the policy and the programs and so remains largely outside the public domain. It would be no easy matter to research this area as the anonymous authors of the *Bright Futures* documents worked under the bureaucratic umbrella of the education department (see, Department of Education 1996; DSE 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). Despite significant effort and with support from the State Library of Victoria and the University of Melbourne, specific evidence of the directives that instigated the *Bright Futures* policy enactments remains hidden. As noted

in this thesis, the *Bright Futures* gifted policy faded from prominence with the 1999 election of a Labor Government but this new government and subsequent State Labor governments have not officially revoked the policy (Pam Matters, pers. comm., 1st December 2008). It would be of interest to researchers of educational policy formation and gifted education to understand whether this lack of initiative is an administrative oversight or a deliberate decision to leave the policy in place but relatively muted (see DEECD 2008a).

Any history of gifted education in Victoria must clearly and overtly contextualise the nascence of gifted education within those branches of the emergent fields of psychology and social sciences which served to classify, organise and divide populations according to intelligence. By learning from the past and documenting the changes that occurred in the history of Victorian education, perhaps the context of endeavouring to implement Victoria's first gifted education policy might be better understood. The pervading sense of an egalitarian ethos meant that the notion of giftedness and educational provision for the gifted did not flourish in Victoria. Although the notion of giftedness remains viable, it is somewhat stunted, rather tenaciously clinging to life, and surreptitiously slinking around any suggestion of elitism – a pejorative concept other than when associated with achievement in the sporting realm. The desire to implement a gifted policy is of itself an indication of the perversity of the broad Australian character as, Victoria (and Australia) has never been immune to elitist or dividing practices in other social domains related to social class, religious preference or race. Thus, despite the best efforts of the New Right government, the *Bright Futures* gifted policy might briefly have unsettled teachers but it did not infiltrate their egalitarian standpoint. In this sense the *Bright Futures* initiative failed, as the case-study teachers in at least one school show.

However, these teachers continue to strive for excellence by embracing the egalitarian philosophy of providing an equality of educational challenge and opportunity. Any historical evaluation of attempts to formalise gifted education in Victoria must pay heed to the masculinist values and expectations that continue to thrive, albeit unconsciously, within educational institutions such as

that case study site. Girls are not equally recognised and so further examination of how teachers' gendered constructions, behaviours and attitudes impact upon girls and their educational development is necessary.

This thesis, then, has contributed to the understandings and knowledge about the practice and struggles over gifted education and the enactment of the 1995 *Bright Futures* gifted education policy in Victoria. But it has also generated further questions and lines of enquiry for future research related to professional knowledge, conduct, learning and development. Despite the best economic rationalist efforts of a neo-liberal government which marketised education via the *Schools of the Future*, and emphasised accountability and individualism using its *Bright Futures* gifted policy to build human capital, this thesis has demonstrated that the concept of giftedness is not held as a "truth" by all teachers, even those striving for excellence in a successful and high status school. So, gifted children remain an illusion of certainty - for at least one school community - despite the best efforts of gifted education researchers, policy makers and the accompanying gifted education industry to make it otherwise.

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Appendix 1: Education Department of Victoria Timeline

Year	Date	Title
1873		The Education Department of Victoria
1985		The Ministry of Education
1991		The Ministry of Education and Training
1992	January	The Department of School Education
1992	October	The Department of Education
1999		The Department of Education, Employment and Training
2002	February	The Department of Education and Training
2006		The Department of Education
2007	2 nd August	The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Source: State Library of Victoria

Anne Lascelles⁵³ Webinfo@slv.vic.gov.au

Department of Education Victoria (under its various names)

Victorian Government Directory 1980, *Annual Report* Department of the Premier, Melbourne

⁵³ I requested assistance to verify the various iterations of the Department of Education (Victoria) and the response was '[W]hile this seems a straight [sic] forward request, it is a bit tricky as there is no definitive list of departmental name changes (Lascelles, A. 2007, pers. comm. 21 Nov.).

Appendix 2: Sample questions and prompts for interviews

Participant details

- Gender
- Age
- Teaching status (full time/part time/administration)
- Years of service/years at APS
- Locations
- KLA specialisations
- Personal teaching philosophy
- Passions

Gifted

- Terminology: gifted, talented, intelligence, MI, skills, extension, enrichment
- Construct of giftedness: “reality” or otherwise/feelings about the construct

Bright Futures

- Explain how you feel about DET policy initiatives and related PD programs such as *Bright Futures*.
- Did you participate in the BFPD?
- If yes, how do you believe that participating in the program informed you/changed your understanding of gifted education/teaching practices?
- If no, share your reasons for not attending/understanding of gifted education/relationship of this understanding for curriculum differentiation.

Teaching

- Are there any gifted students in your classroom/this school?
- How do you (not) know?
- If yes, how do you cater for their particular educational/social/emotional/personal needs?
- Explain your understanding of gifted behaviours.

Gender

- Is there a difference in the behaviours/characteristics of gifted girls and boys?
- Explain (yes or no)
- Student interaction(s)/behaviour(s)

Triggers

- Tell me about ...
- How would you describe
- What are your understandings/feelings/personal perceptions about ...
 - Curriculum
 - Teaching/support materials/programs
 - Learning/learning styles
 - Outside school programs/tasks/G.A.T.E.WAYS
 - Motivation
 - Student involvement in teaching/learning/lesson planning/opportunities for self determination
 - Creative and critical thinking
 - Higher order thinking
 - Creativity
 - Community interaction/parents
 - Atlas Primary School



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