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Principals Discuss Gifted Education: An Analysis of Discourse

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

Master of Education

at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand.

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2000

Acknowledgements

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the help and support of my supervisors, Tracy Riley and Andy Lock.

I would like to thank the participants for sharing their time and thoughts. Massey University Ethics committee approval was granted before research began.

I would especially like to thank Nana Jill, Poppa George, Grandma, Grandad, Aunty Allie, Aunty Kylie and of course Daddy for taking loving care of Caitie while Mummy did her study.

Abstract

When discussing the allocation of resources to gifted students in their schools, principals draw upon a number of discursive resources to explain, justify, maintain and dismiss arguments relating to equity and student needs. This discourse analysis of interviews with New Zealand principals shows how language is used to build a construct of 'giftedness', which is limiting in its view of the characteristics of gifted children and their educational needs. Principals describe their school's gifted educational programmes as being based upon the 'restrictions' of organisational structures which leads to the prioritisation of students 'needs.' Often the needs of special needs students are prioritised over those of gifted students in the name of 'equity'. Educators' discourse, which tends to focus on technical issues rather than theory, helps to cloak the moral and ideological nature of such practice by presenting it as the result of pragmatic issues beyond the influence of school principals. Analysis of educators' discourse is an important basis from which to challenge practice, which limits the educational opportunities of gifted students.

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SECTION ONE: Context

Introduction

In his account of the history of gifted education in New Zealand Moltzen (1996) paints a picture of a country led by committed individuals who float at the mercy of tides of fashionable education and government policy. With each new wave of interest comes new definitions, programme ideals and theories designed to promote and improve education for gifted children. Eventually, however, the tide turns and promoters of gifted education find themselves defending their beliefs and competing for resources and support. While Moltzen describes the current situation as “holding more promise than many previous periods” he is not fully optimistic. “There is...no real reason to believe that any improvements will be more enduring than the short-lived gains of the past” (Moltzen, 1996:1). This pessimistic view tends to pervade the work of many educators in the field of gifted education. The learning needs of gifted and talented children receive little recognition, little commitment, and little sustained support by policy-makers in New Zealand (O’Neill et al, 1995:2).

More recently Cathcart notes that “unsurprisingly, an international review of gifted education...concluded that New Zealand has one of the weakest commitments to the gifted” (Cathcart 1996:122). While she acknowledges a number of initiatives in this area she is not overly hopeful: “the legacy of our inadequate teacher training, resourcing and advisory support will be with us for some time yet” (Cathcart 1996:122). The Ministry of Education’s most recent publication on the topic “has been published in response to the growing awareness that many of our gifted and talented students go unrecognised, and that those who are identified often do not take part in an educational programme appropriate to their needs” (Fancy in Anderson , 2000).

Is the reason some find little hope in the future of gifted education due to the fact that the views and attitudes of educationalists, as seen through their language, has changed little in the last century? Clark (1992) claims that despite research to the contrary

many myths about the nature of gifted children persevere. "The same statements continue to be made and the same beliefs continue to be expressed as though throughout the years there have been no new data available about how human beings learn" (Clark, 1997:84).

Passow (in Siegel & Jausovec, 1994) describes attitudes toward giftedness as cyclical, commenting that at that time attitudes in Europe seemed to be turning toward increased involvement and awareness. This is reflected in a number of 'attitude studies' that portray positive feelings towards gifted students (Simdchens & Sellin, 1976; Leyser & Abrams, 1982; Parish et al., 1993; O'Neill, 1995). However, Begin and Gagne (1994) are reluctant to conclude one way or another as to a definitive public attitude towards educational services for gifted students. "If there is any consensus coming from the results of these surveys, it is the total absence of consensus regarding this question. The opinions expressed range from complete rejection of such services, usually based on ideological grounds, to unreserved support for them" (Begin & Gagne, 1994:74).

A study of attitudes is important if one is interested in examining current practice in gifted education, especially if the aim is to advocate for change. McAlpine (1992) claims "attitudes which society holds towards the gifted and talented are amongst the most pervasive forces affecting their welfare" (28). He reasons that attitudes are linked to both administrative and policy decision making and to gifted children's self-concept and mental health. Gross (in O'Neill, 1995) claims factors in the provisions for gifted education in Australia to be "the extent to which the principal can withstand the egalitarian ethos of the education system" and "the attitudes of the community" (O'Neill, 1995:2). "Attitudes of educators towards gifted students affect not only the students and their performance, but also the acceptance and effectiveness of the gifted programme and the morale of the school as a whole." (Clark, 1997:82/3)

How one measures such attitudes and beliefs is however a topic of debate. Potter and Wetherell (1987) question the generalisations made by empirical research methods, claiming that the malleable and contextual nature of an 'attitude' make it unsuitable for the constraints of questionnaire based studies. Siegel and Jausovec (1994) describe how community attitudes can be explained in terms of cultural, social and political influences. They illustrate this through the variance in attitudes towards gifted

education in Europe, as reflected in the variance in political ideologies. In Eastern Europe gifted students were used as political propaganda while in the UK mixed ability classes are reflective of 'equality' based political ideals (Siegel & Jausovec, 1994).

It may not be the *actions* of the past that are holding us back, but rather an *ideology* and 'attitude' toward gifted children that still shows in the discourse of educators. This study has examined the 'attitudes' of New Zealand educational administrators through an investigation of the discourse used by principals in their discussions on gifted education. The word attitude is used in a broad sense to include ideological and pragmatic issues (as is discussed further). These attitudes are discussed in terms of social, cultural and political ideology and the implications of such on practice. Through the presentation of the discourse used by educators and discussion of the implications of such discourse readers may come to form an understanding of why promoters of gifted education fight against pessimism. Perhaps these understandings will encourage individuals to examine and challenge their own discourse in terms of gifted education in New Zealand.

Attitudes towards Gifted Education

Several attitude studies on issues in gifted education can be found and quoted. However these studies are diverse in both their construct and their objectives, making it difficult to present a cohesive report on just what are 'society's attitudes' towards gifted education. The cultural, social and political nature of attitudes, the variance in definitions of giftedness and the debate over what constitutes valid research makes such a goal complex, if not unrealistic. The following discussion summarises the common themes presented by international writers and researchers in the field of education.

One of New Zealand's early influences in the field, George Parkyn, noted the influence of egalitarianist attitudes towards gifted education. "I am aware that there will be not a few teachers who will regard my proposals as undemocratic" (Parkyn, 1953:229). "The effort being made is threatened equally by those, on the one hand, who wish to retain a sharp distinction between the kind of educational provision that is suited to the highly intelligent and that which is sufficient for the majority, and by those on the other hand, who appear to scent unjust privilege in almost any form of selection and educational differentiation" (Parkyn, 1953:216).

Parkyn's work is based on that of Lewis Terman, a researcher who Moltzen (1996) claims "laid the foundation for a more accepting attitude towards the gifted by presenting them as 'real' people rather than maladjusted 'freaks'" (Moltzen, 1996:2). This highlights the situation at the time (the 1950's): a major issue for gifted educators was public acceptance of their charges, and in order to gain that public acceptance gifted children had to be seen conforming to the social expectations of the time. Such attitudes were named "anti-intellectualism" by Fox in 1968 when he found societal attitudes were based on the belief that intellectual brilliance is not 'normal' and therefore to be distrusted (in Wyatt, 1982:140).

The need to seek out public acceptance seems to be a recurring theme in gifted education globally, as can be seen from such titles as "*Responsibility for Gifted Learners – A Plea for the Encouragement of Classroom Teacher Support*" (Wyatt, 1982) and "*Building Advocacy Through Program Design, Student Productivity and*

Public Relations" (Renzulli & Reis, 1991-1). This last title shows the critical importance of reflecting on the way attitudes affect educational practice. The title seems to imply that catering for public approval should take priority over planning for children's actual learning needs.

Renzulli, whose educational models have had popular acceptance in New Zealand (Townsend, 1996), describes programmes for gifted students as 'extremely vulnerable' and claims that supporters of gifted education need to provide 'defensible' answers to their critics (Renzulli, 1977:1) The word 'defensible' occurs not only in the title of his book but also repeatedly in its contents as he strives to provide the rationale of his work and by doing so give educators in the field of gifted education defence against criticism. One of the goals of his model is 'to minimise elitist attitudes and negative connotations often associated with the traditional gifted programme' (Riley, 1996:188).

This highlights his concern about the public perception of gifted education, much of which he blames on the way gifted education and children are represented through language. "We should judiciously avoid saying that a young person is either 'gifted' or 'not gifted'. It is precisely these kinds of statements that offend many people and raise all of the accusations of elitism that have plagued our field." (Renzulli, 1991-1:183) Renzulli's statements illustrate the depth of associated meaning attached to the label 'gifted'. "The misuse of the concept of giftedness has given rise to a great deal of criticism and confusion about both identification and programming and the result has been that so many mixed messages have been sent to educators and the public at large that both groups now have justifiable scepticism about the credibility of the gifted education establishment and our ability to offer services that are qualitatively different from general education" (Renzulli, 1992:35)

One can quote several attitude studies that conclude that gifted students are thought of in a positive light. The definition of an attitude used by Smidchens and Sellin was identified through three behaviours: willingness to support services, willingness to teach and willingness to have one's own child interact with a gifted child (Smidchens & Sellin, 1976:109). This they measured with a weighted scale questionnaire, given to teachers in the United States of America,; from *I'd like it very much* through to *I'd be*

strongly against it. From this they concluded that “mentally advanced learners” were viewed as positive to teach, but not a high priority for service (Simdchens & Sellin, 1976:111). A similar study of teachers, also in America, by Leyser and Abrams (1982), using a ‘social distance scale’ showed that “gifted groups represent the favourable end on an acceptance-rejection continuum” and, interestingly, that “gifted persons are the only ones who would be accepted as spouses” (Leyser & Abrams, 1982:232). While their scale rated teacher’s attitudes by asking a series of questions on a scale of acceptance (from “I would marry that person” to “I would exclude that person from my country”) they did not ask the teachers to rate how they felt about having such children in their classroom. A decade later Parish, Menuey and Knowles found through their ‘Personal Attribute Inventory’ that American “teachers’ attitudes toward handicapped students were significantly more negative than their attitudes toward gifted students” (Parish et al., 1993:250).

In 1998 Taplin and White reported that their questionnaire study found that parents of gifted children in Australia view programs that are currently provided quite positively, but believe there should be more provision and more support from schools if their children are to be adequately catered for (Taplin & White, 1998:46). Recently conducted New Zealand studies give similar results. O’Neill (1995) and others conducted a telephone survey of 100 adults to determine attitudes towards programmes for gifted children. They found “parents and the general public wanted schools to do more to challenge able students and to provide differentiated methods of teaching” (O’Neill, 1995:2). Another study, designed to measure attitudes towards acceleration for gifted children, showed a somewhat different result in terms of the attitudes of educators. Townsend and Patrick (1996) surveyed teachers and teacher trainees using an attitude scale and concluded that “the academic acceleration of young, gifted children in school is viewed with suspicion by many educators in spite of a great deal of research indicating positive effects on achievement and few if any negative effects on social and emotional adjustment” (Townsend & Patrick, 1996:2).

It is important to look critically at the methodology and design of these studies when considering their results. Studies that rely on questionnaires and standardised interviews often tend to limit the range of responses available to a participant. Research which sets out to compare responses against pre-set variables can miss

important factors as participants are not always encouraged to elaborate on their answers (Townsend & Patrick, 1996). Townsend and Patrick (1996) themselves admit the language used in their study may have swayed the results: “the tone of the attitude scale (in which all items were worded negatively) may have been instrumental in fostering a rather negative response set for the majority of respondents” (Townsend & Patrick, 1996: 11).

Another problem is the presumption that the researchers’ definition of ‘gifted’ is universally understood and agreed to by the participants. Some studies deliberately compare attitudes towards gifted children against attitudes towards ‘normal’ and ‘handicapped’ students (see Parish et al, 1993; Leyser & Abrams, 1982). The definition of each category then becomes inter-relational; what one includes in each category depends upon what is included in the others. By presenting each category simultaneously in one study researchers are forcing respondents to distinguish between their attitudes towards each which may be an artificial representation of the participants’ actual feelings. Such practice serves to fuel the polarisation of gifted and special needs, giving further substance to the social construct of each group.

In fact, although dozens of studies have been conducted on the predictors of attitudes towards gifted education, authors Begin and Gagne (1994) point out that it is still difficult to pinpoint an explanation of the variation in attitude and the major factors involved. They claim the difficulty comes in synthesising the diverse questionnaires, the differing ways of measuring and defining ‘attitude’ and the noncomparability of samples (Begin & Gagne, 1994).

Dunstan (1987) points out the complexity of analysing attitude statements.

The expression of an opinion may rightly be taken at face value, but in other cases it may more appropriately represent the conscious or unconscious justification of hidden personal motivation. Some people may oppose special amenities for intellectually gifted children because they consider that their own children are insufficiently able to take advantage of such things; but since self-esteem will not permit the real reason to be divulged, they express their opposition in terms of social injustice or personality damage. Others may forcefully advocate special provision for the gifted, and talk grandly about the realisation of human potential or the national interest; but the realisation on which they are overwhelmingly bent is that of their own ambition for their children. [But] let us not take this objection too far. Once we become preoccupied with the subjectivity of attitudes and opinions we are ultimately led into the futile position of being unable to accept what anyone says he thinks about anything. And in one way or another we are all interested parties now (Dunstan, 1987:53).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) claim the problem with traditional attitude studies lies in the theory underpinning the design of such research. They have concerns about research that operates under the assumption that an attitude is an enduring internal state of mind or feeling. "From a discourse analytic perspective, given different purposes or a different context a very different 'attitude' may be expressed" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:45). Due to the nature of discourse, attitudes are reconstructed as they are expressed and so can be variable and contradictory in nature. "In conversations people do not repeat themselves exactly, but they formulate utterances which, at least in their detail, are novel" (Billig, 1997:44). Thus as people discuss their stance or belief they continually redefine themselves in terms of their audience and the changing purpose and function of their speech. This questions the generalisations made about attitudes measured by empirical research methods.

However to critique research findings on the basis of their objectivity is to accept the notion of objectivity as a feasible goal of research. Mishler (1986:26/7) claims that investigators who try to standardise interviewers, questions and responses are attempting to "avoid rather than to confront directly the interrelated problems of context, discourse and meaning". One could argue that the main problem with the approach taken in the types of attitude studies mentioned above *is* the approach taken in these types of attitude studies. Such research works under the assumption that 'facts' are there for the finding and may be rooted out through rigorously standardised 'objective' research. These 'attitudes' are assumed to be independent entities separated from ideology, culture and politics. Two points of contention may be raised here: one concerns the nature of 'knowledge' and 'facts', the other deals with the issue of 'objectivity'. Both can be addressed in a discussion of discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis: What and why?

When embarking on topics of study in the social sciences researchers have a vast array of research designs, methods and approaches to choose from. Each have differing philosophical and theoretical backgrounds and assumptions, and these assumptions need to be recognised when research results are made available for public inspection. In employing the research design of discourse analysis this research makes an assumption about language and the part it plays in the construction and regeneration of 'truth'.

Discourse analysis is partly based on criticisms of 'conventional' research methods (Tuffin, 1996:4). It has grown from a critical movement in social psychology (Billig, 1997) spurred on by support from feminist poststructuralism (Gavey, 1989) and represents a change in both epistemology and methodology. Gergen (1997) claims that traditional empirical research depends on the belief that knowledge accumulates to give a value-neutral fix on the realities of social life. In contrast discourse analysis follows an assumption that knowledge is constructed through social relations, is transient and unstable, and closely associated with power (Gavey, 1989). 'All truth claims are treated with scepticism and a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge is encouraged (Tuffin, 1996:2).

This analysis of discourse does not seek to present its findings as 'objective' static 'knowledge' or 'facts', as these words are used in traditional research. "Researcher findings don't have any meaning until they are interpreted, and these interpretations are not demanded by the findings themselves. They result from a process of negotiating meaning within the community" (Gergen, 1997:119). Because knowledge is dependent upon interpretation it is difficult to claim it as value-free; instead it is dependent upon those with the power to claim its status as 'knowledge'. "If there is not an objective basis for distinguishing between true and false beliefs, then it seems that power alone will determine the outcome of competing truth claims" (Gavey, 1989:462). Gavey (1989) goes on to claim that it is through discourse that power is exercised, established and perpetuated.

When knowledge is considered to be a process of social construction, objectivity is no

longer assumed to be a factor and power relations come under scrutiny. Theories of language and discourse can be used to examine power structures and thus lead to suggestions for change (Gavey, 1989). Language is the subject under study as it is argued that language is the means of the social construction of knowledge. Language is not considered to be a neutral medium which simply “describes events as they really happen”, rather is regarded as more active, “constructing rather than reflecting that which it portrays” (Tuffin et al, 1996:4). “Language is the primary means by which we create the categories that subsequently come to organise our lives for us” (Poynton, 1989:4). It is these categories, the use of power and the subtle construction of reality that concerns the discourse analyst.

Discourse analysis is concerned with the ways in which language constructs objects, subjects and experiences, including subjectivity and a sense of self... They argue that the linguistic categories we use in order to describe reality are not in fact reflections of intrinsic and defining feature of entities. Instead, they bring into being the objects they describe. Furthermore, there is always more than one way of describing something and our choice of how to use words to package perceptions and experiences gives rise to particular versions of events and of reality. It is in this sense that language can be said to construct reality (Willig, 1999:2).

The construction of knowledge through language is regulated by the nature of discourse itself – its link to ideology, its structural limitations and its social quality. “Individuals, when they speak, do not create their own language, but they use terms which are culturally, historically, and ideologically available. Each act of utterance, although in itself novel, carries an ideological history” (Billig, 1997:48). Ideology could be defined as “the ways of thinking and behaving within a given society which make the ways of that society seem natural or unquestioned to its members” (Eagleton in Billig, 1997:48). Ideology becomes the ‘common sense’ of society, or ‘habits of belief’ which then make inequalities appear natural or inevitable (Billig, 1997:48). The language of each individual reflects the ideology, social relations and discursive actions of their time and place in history.

But one should not assume that a dominant ideology is accepted and regenerated passively. Although it should be noted that actions are limited to the discourse that is available there is still freedom to challenge existing ideologies (once they are recognised) and present alternative views. Discourse analysis can be used as a tool to challenge social practices which perpetuate and legitimate exploitation and oppression, and can facilitate empowerment through a repositioning of the subject (Willig,

1999:148). However the critique of common practice and freedom from dominant ideology is not a synonym for the path to pure 'truth'. Instead society is simply reconstructing a new ideology to live by.

As noted, the nature of discourse affects that production of knowledge. New discourse production is limited by the boundaries of existing discourses. "A discourse takes effect indirectly or directly through its relation to another discourse" (Macdonnell, 1986:3). Thus it becomes difficult to express oneself outside of an existing discourse, as new ideas are understood in terms of their relation to the listeners' existing understanding. We can only express what we have words for, and others can only gain meaning through interpretations based on their present perceptions. This relation to existing discourse then becomes the basis of new discourse construction. A discourse then goes on to define itself not only by what it intends to express, but also by what it neglects to express. "Any discourse concerns itself with certain objects and puts forward certain concepts at the expense of others" (Macdonnell, 1986:3). What is neglected is of as much importance to the analyst as what is built into a discourse. "In investigating ideologies one is looking not merely for the themes which are presented as 'common sense' but also for what is commonsensically left unsaid and what is assumed to be beyond controversy" (Billig, 1997:51).

Gee (1999) uses a study by Hanks (1996) on Mayan culture to illustrate how difficult it sometimes is to see reality-construction at work within one's own discourse. The Mayans under study used the word 'drinking' to refer to partaking in their morning and evening meal (for the total duration of social engagement, not just the actual activity of consuming the meal) while 'eating' referred to their larger main meal in the midafternoon. This example illustrates how meaning is wedded to localised social and cultural practice (Gee, 1999:63). Arguably many speakers would take for granted that the words 'eat' and 'drink' as they stood in their language referred to standard common practice – a 'real' activity not open to debate. "It is easy for us to miss the specificity and localness of our own practices and think we have general, abstract, even universal meanings" (Gee, 1999:64). Instead one needs to recognise the localised social and cultural nature of language in order to confront that which if left unchallenged may continue inequities within society.

It is important to clarify what is meant here by 'discourse'. Gee (1999:7) distinguishes between two common meanings of discourse: "little d" discourse he defines as "language-in-use", that is "how language is used on site to enact activities and identities". The merge of this discourse with non-language "stuff" is what Gee (1999:7) terms "big d" Discourse. A Discourse concerns not just language but also "ways of thinking or feeling, ways of manipulating objects or tools, ways of using non-linguistic symbol systems, etc" (Gee, 1999:10). "Discourses can split into two or more Discourses, or two or more Discourses can meld together...new Discourses emerge and old ones die all the time...Discourses are always defined in relationships of complicity and contestation with other Discourses (Gee, 1999:21/2). Although the words 'language' and 'discourse' are often used interchangeably throughout this work, it is Gee's concept of "big d Discourse" that has had most influence on the analysis process undertaken in this research.

Discourses are not isolated or singular, but are diverse and variable. By offering expressions of particular 'knowledge' a discourse offers society and individuals options in terms of their stance on this knowledge. "Discourses are multiple...they offer subject positions for individuals to take up...the dominant discourses appear 'natural', denying their own partiality and gaining their authority by appealing to common sense" (Gavey, 1989:464). Using differing discourses in differing situations allows speakers to use language to gain desired results. For example when describing an event a speaker's language may change depending on whether the intention is to justify, condemn, persuade, accuse, deny, explain, excuse or request. One of the major components of the analysis of discourse is the exploration of these functions of language – how people use their language to do things (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). "Language is involved in doing some very important psychological business and for this reason should be the focus of study in its own right" (Tuffin et al, 1996:5). These functions will change according to the speaker's situation and audience, and thus there will be variation in the discourse used. This variation, instead of becoming problematic, becomes another area for analysis. The researcher is interested in the different ways in which texts are organised, and the consequences of using certain organisations rather than others (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

It is important to note again the distinction between the goal of traditional research,

which may be to discover, reveal or uncover some fact or truth (Gavey, 1989) and the goal of discourse analysis which is more an aim to show how these 'truths' have been constructed and regenerated – and thereby suggest how they might be challenged. "The aim is to see how the themes of ideology are instantiated in ordinary talk, and how speakers are part of, and are continuing, the ideological history of the discursive themes which they are using" (Billig, 1997:49).

In order to uncover discursive themes texts are analysed in terms of their structure and the function of this structure. Texts are not analysed in isolation rather they are to be understood in terms of their context. 'Discourses' are examined in terms of their relationship to other 'Discourses'. Rhetorical patterns, language choices, semantics, contradictions, grammar, cultural models are among the things a discourse analyst may look for. Researchers who undertake such study claim that there is no one set 'method' of achieving discourse analysis (Gavey, 1989). This leaves the novice 'up a creek' with far more paddles than hands. Gee (1999) suggests one way to start such an analysis is to identify common themes or 'Conversations' incorporated in a discourse as this may then lead to deeper examination of hidden ideology.

Capital C - Conversations on Gifted Education

Within Discourses (big d) are a range of words, symbols and images that, within a given time and place and with respect to a certain theme or topic, are regarded as “appropriate”. This is what Gee (1999) refers to as “big c” Conversations.

Conversations are “long-running and important themes or motifs that have been the focus of a variety of different texts and interactions (in different social languages and Discourses) through a significant stretch of time and across an array of institutions” (Gee, 1999:13). Identification of Conversations allows an analyst easier access to ‘situated meanings’ which circulate with and across Discourses in history (Gee, 1999:37). A situated meaning Gee defines as an image or pattern that we assemble ‘on the spot’ as we communicate in a given context, based on our construal of that context and on our past experiences (Gee, 1994:80).

A review of the international literature on gifted education highlights a number of ‘Conversations’ and presents common themes integral to education discourse. Certain ‘arguments’ can be identified and categorised, although in real terms these arguments are inter-related to each other and the ideological beliefs about equity, priorities, societal needs and the nature of learning that lie behind them. Dunstan (1987) uses a typology of attitudes to illustrate the range of positions towards provisions for giftedness. This typology separates supportive, neutral and hostile attitudes into individual, societal, combined and unspecified subgroups.

Arguments placed under the heading societal-hostile are based on the prioritisation of perceived ‘social justice’ over individual need (Dunstan, 1987:50). The ‘pursuit of actual equality’ combined with the belief that gifted children are ‘already favoured’ leads to the idea that special provision for gifted students ‘provokes social disharmony’ (Dunstan, 1987:50). When operating under the assumption that gifted students are capable of success regardless of educational input or environment, it can be argued that specialist provision for gifted children is giving an added privilege to those already advantaged. “They are going to succeed anyway” is a catch-phrase often used as justification when limited resources lead to prioritisation of services to special needs children over gifted children (Clark, 1997; Cox, 1993; Linzer Swartz, 1994; Silverman, 1997; Townsend & Patrick, 1996).

Often the educational experiences found in gifted programmes are perceived to be of value to all students, and therefore to withhold such education from all but a small group is seen as elitist (Linzer Swartz, 1994; Parkyn, 1953; Townsend & Patrick, 1996). The word 'elitist' has often been associated with gifted programmes (Begin & Gagne, 1994; Borland 1997; Clark, 1997; Dunstan, 1987; Renzulli & Reis, 1991; Renzulli & Reis, 1992). Begin and Gagne (1994) claim statistics that show that participants in gifted programmes come in disproportionate numbers from more affluent, non-minority families reinforce accusations of elitism. Some researchers in gifted education have taken this concern as an indication that gifted identification programmes need to be altered to ensure students of all races and backgrounds have equal opportunity of selection (Renzulli & Reis, 1991-1).

What Dunstan (1987) calls a 'societal-supportive' stance has been reflected by many writers; that is that gifted children are an undeveloped resource of potential worth to society. Gifted education is argued to be a national investment in future leaders necessary in an age of international competition (Borland, 1997; Cox 1993; Linzer Schwartz, 1994; O'Neill et al 1995; Renzulli & Reis, 1991-2; Young & Tyre, 1992). As with the position above this stance pits national good against individual need. The focus is taken away from the need of the individual student, dehumanising policy decisions and turning children into potential adult assets or liabilities. "If the national resource model is invoked, the rationale for gifted education is the promotion of the common good, identification is a matter of predicting adult giftedness on the basis of childhood behaviours and traits, and differentiated curriculum serves to develop potential so that adult productivity is realised" (Borland, 1997:15). This suggests that to focus on 'future potential' is to risk overlooking present needs.

It could be argued that policy written under the direction of such a belief will provide only for certain definitions and areas of giftedness, those seen by the dominant group to be of importance to national development. "The value of the gifted to society often depends on the shifting winds and priorities of their culture" (Silverman, 1997:38). What is to be included would be dependent on the cultural, economic and political goals of the time. Dunstan (1987) points out another danger; if gifted education is to be looked at as a national 'investment' then by implication it may also be concerned

with 'results' and 'efficiency' rather than student needs. Another side effect of giftedness for national benefit is the idea that students are to use their talents "in ways that respect positive community values and civic-mindedness" (Renzulli & Reis, 1991-1). While this sounds a noble enough idea one needs to question who is defining 'positive community values and civic mindedness.'

The attitudes represented by Dunstan's 'individual-hostile' category are rather diverse (Dunstan, 1987:51). One argument against specialised gifted education is its perceived potential to foster social and emotional problems in gifted students. "It may be felt that it is psychologically bad for a young person to be singled out and treated as special, because undesirable traits such as egoism and superciliousness may develop" (Dunstan, 1987:51). Others fear isolation in small groups of like students may prevent gifted children from learning to develop relationships with non-gifted peers. Such potentially negative effects on social and emotional development are reasons given for opposition to specialist and accelerated classes for gifted children (McAlpine, 1992; Parkyn, 1953; Taplin & White, 1998; Townsend & Patrick, 1996). This belief is often based on the assumption that children need to be 'well-rounded' with experiences in sports, arts, cultural, social events and same-age friendships in order to be 'healthy' and 'happy' – a belief which should be challenged for its conformity issues.

Others argue that rather than being the cause of emotional problems specialised education is in fact *necessary* to promote healthy social and emotional development in gifted youngsters. "Abilities must be catered for in order that the individual will realise his [or her] utmost potential and attain self-fulfilment" (Dunstan, 1987:52). Some studies conclude acceleration may enhance social and emotional adjustment (Richardson & Benbow in Townsend & Patrick, 1996).

From a 'democratic' standpoint gifted education can be seen as a matter of equal rights. Giftedness can be viewed as a diverse learning style, or the result of unusual development, and as such gifted students are entitled to an education best suited to their particular needs. This stance which Renzulli titles "the unique-needs-of-gifted-students argument" (1991-1:182) is reiterated in much research (see Borland 1997; Clark, 1997; Dunstan, 1987; McAlpine, 1992). Special education for the gifted has been referred to as a "moral obligation" (Linzer Swartz, 1994:1) and a "legal right"

(Cox, 1993:7). Silverman (1997) believes that viewing giftedness as a result of asynchronous development negates arguments of elitism. "Asynchrony is certainly not a source of envy, and it is unlikely to generate the kind of vitriolic public debate that exists with our current views of giftedness as high potential for success in adult life" (Silverman, 1997:38).

However, Margolin (1994) argues that promoters of gifted education use Conversations of democracy and asynchronous development to reinforce inequalities and serve personal and political agendas.

"Gifted education appropriates 'democracy' in order to disguise or conceal power and also to create a system of beliefs within which power can operate. By taking as a given what is in fact highly problematic – the availability and accessibility of every student's idiosyncratic ability level – gifted education's conception of democracy becomes not only the principle for recognising differences, but also an imperative for accentuating and preserving them" (Margolin, 199:138).

Sapon-Shevin (1994) contends that a discussion of the merits of gifted education takes for granted an assumption which she challenges: the actual existence of 'gifted children.'

"Rather than viewing giftedness as a 'natural fact', we can see the category of 'giftedness' as a social construct, a way of thinking and describing that exists in the eyes of the definers...Recognising giftedness as a social construct means acknowledging that without school rules and policies, legal and educational practices designed to provide services to gifted students, this category, per se, would not exist." Sapon-Shevin, 1994:16/17).

Her book *Playing Favourites* presents the thesis that discourses used by supporters of gifted educators operate to 'silence' opposition by using the language of science and equity to negate 'emotionally based' counter-arguments of elitism. She presents the case that specialist withdrawal will hinder social development and states that such "pleas for the consideration of children's self-worth, community and mutual regard are dismissed as 'unscientific', 'soft issues', and not related to the rigorous dialogue about evaluation and assessment models" (Sapon-Shevin, 1994:46 quotation marks in original).

Borland (1997) suggests that recognition of giftedness as a social construct allows educators and policy makers to better address inequities. "I think 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)” (Borland, 1997:18).

When giftedness is seen as a result of educational input, separate gifted programmes for small groups are argued to be elitist and debates are raised over why some children are selected over others. Giftedness as a social construct opens up issues of elitist power games. When giftedness is seen to be a product of genetics then it could be argued that gifted students will succeed despite their environment and therefore the limited educational resources should be used in more ‘needy’ areas. Giftedness as a diverse learning need calls for an education system that caters equitably for those needs. Giftedness as a national resource calls for commitment to educational excellence but in return reduces children to public goods.

‘Conversations’ on gifted education can be examined in terms of the ideological assumptions they make about the nature of giftedness, intelligence and education. When engaging in such debates speakers are reinforcing notions of equity, social justice, and the needs of students. This review has sought not only to identify common Conversations but also to highlight the consequences of employing such Conversations without acknowledgement of the assumptions hidden within them. The language and grammar employed in these Conversations allow the speaker to perform various social and political functions. Through discourse analysis this language can be examined in terms of the ‘realities’ it helps to reinforce and construct, and the implications of language choice can be considered.

What Conversations can be found in the discourse of New Zealand educators? What are the situated meanings and cultural models involved in these Conversations? What relationships and identities are being presented in the language of school principals? What actions are being played out in this discourse? What social goods, status and rights issues are at play in this discourse? These are some of the questions this research sets out to answer.

SECTION TWO: Process

Research Objectives

Through the design of discourse analysis this study examines the discourse used by school principals when justifying and describing their school's current practice in gifted education. This discourse is examined in terms of common themes (or 'Conversations'), their ideological nature and assumptions. The implications on both current practice and future initiatives of the identified Conversations will also be discussed.

Research Objectives:

- Investigate the ways principals describe and justify the treatment of gifted education in New Zealand
- Explore the implications of these positions and the ways they are justified in the context of wider beliefs about the nature of equity and equality in education
- Explore how these beliefs influence gifted education.

Research Questions:

- What are the common discourses employed by primary principals when discussing gifted education?
- What reasons do principals give for the nature and extent of gifted education programmes currently practised at their schools?
- What functions does the identified discourse serve?
- How does the use of such discourse impact on practice in schools?

Sample

Discourse analysis differs greatly in its treatment of sample size and selection from other research methods. The labour intensive nature of discourse analysis does not lend itself to large samples of texts, nor is it believed that large amounts of data necessarily lead to a greater quality of analysis. "Because one is interested in language use rather than the people generating the language and because a large number of linguistic patterns are likely to

emerge from a few people, small samples or a few interviews are generally quite adequate for investigating an interesting and practically important range of phenomena” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:161).

For the purpose of this study a sample of five Auckland primary school principals were randomly selected for interviews. Principals were chosen as research subjects because of their pivotal role in the planning and implementation of educational policy and practice in New Zealand schools. Thorburn (1994) claims principals hold significant influence over a school’s beliefs, values and effectiveness, and that “it is the ‘talk’ of principals that exercises considerable administrative control in a school” (Thorburn, 1994:51).

Interviews

An interview conducted under discourse analysis has a tendency to be more interactive between participants and interviewer than it would normally be under traditional research methods. To recognise ‘knowledge’ as a social construction is to recognise its subjectivity, its inconsistency and its vulnerability. The search for such ‘knowledge’ no longer becomes a quest for hidden treasure, but instead a journey where the explorer draws the map as she goes. Kvale (1996) illustrates how a different notion of knowledge leads to a different approach to research. He uses the metaphors of the miner and the traveller to describe differing approaches to research interviews. The ‘miner’ interviewer views knowledge as ‘buried’, waiting to be ‘unearthed’: “the knowledge is waiting in the subjects’ interior to be uncovered, uncontaminated by the miner” (Kvale, 1996:3). The traveller on the other hand takes the interview to be a ‘journey’ which interviewer and interviewee share (Kvale, 1996:4).

The traveller then does not strive to eliminate interviewer bias through standardised questions but instead recognises the co-constructive nature of conversation, the unequal relationship between interviewer and interviewee and the contextual subjectivity of language. “The goal of traditional interviews is to obtain or measure consistency in participants’ responses; consistency is valued so highly because it is taken as evidence of a corresponding set of actions or beliefs. Consistency is important for the discourse analyst as well, but not in this sense, only to the extent that the researcher wishes to identify regular

patterns in language use” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:163/4).

Consistency in fact becomes problematic when it restricts discourse. The researcher, then, needs to conduct an interview which “allows rather than restricts the diversity of participants’ discourse” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:164). Often this means that the interviewer probes for more information with follow-up queries for particular responses and open-ended questions. This study began with a practice interview with a local principal not on the original selection list to overcome the difficulties involved in developing a systematic yet open-ended interview question schedule. The finalised interview schedule used has been included as Appendix B.

Transcription

As it is the exact structure of the language that is of interest, interviews were transcribed as fully as deemed necessary for the purpose of this research. The interview extracts selected for the report are presented verbatim and include basic transcription symbols to indicate features of the speech (see Appendix A). However, no details related to intonation, speed of delivery, stress or timing are included. Neither are non verbal communications represented. Such full detail was not considered necessary for the nature of analysis undertaken. “It is still important to keep distracting symbols to a minimum in transcripts, depending on the sorts of research questions being asked” (Corson, 1995:14).

Analysis

Transcripts were subjected to a process of ‘coding’: ‘squeezing an unwieldy body of discourse into manageable chunks’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:167). This was simply a practical process of sorting data into defined categories. Categories were related to possible discourses, functions and research objectives and sorted into ‘Conversations.’ Once transcripts were coded analysis began, which involved reading and rereading, looking for patterns and exceptions, functions and consequence. “Academic training teaches people to read for gist...however, the discourse analyst is concerned with the detail of passages of discourse, however fragmented and contradictory, and with what is actually said or written,

not some general idea that seems to be intended. The analyst constantly asks “Why am I reading this passage in this way? What features produce this reading?” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:168). This process involved “forming hypotheses about these functions and effects and searching for linguistic evidence” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:168).

Finally the analysis was organised for report presentation. The report gives not only the findings but also actual examples of the data collected (ie, samples of the text) and illustrations of how conclusions were reached. This is to allow the reader to evaluate the analysis process and partake in active validation of the results. “The goal is to present analysis and conclusion in such a way that the reader is able to assess the researcher’s interpretations” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:172).

Ethical Considerations

Massey University Ethics committee approval was granted before research begun. Ethical considerations were considered when interviews were conducted and transcribed and documents retained for analysis. Before using any transcripts full permission was obtained from all the participants (see Consent Form – Appendix C). Names and identifying symbols were deleted or obscured from all documents for the sake of confidentiality.

Ethical issues were also considered when data was selected for presentation in the final report. Confidentiality and anonymity of subjects becomes a practical difficulty when verbatim interview records are published. Even though names are not used individuals are often identifiable by the originality of their quotes. Although other research methods would encourage generalisations or the deletion of identifying characteristics of responses when presenting data (eg. “most people agreed”), discourse analysis relies on the specifics of language for its analysis and therefore data must be presented in its original form. The potential consequences of such a presentation of data was made clear to participants before they agreed to participate in this research. Specific words, such as names, which were not considered vital to analysis were omitted from extracts if thought necessary to protect participant anonymity.

Throughout the report participants’ gender has been referred to indiscriminately. For ease

of reading and protection of anonymity, speakers were referred to as either he or she randomly.

Participants had the right to withdraw from the project at any stage before results were presented publicly and details were made clear to participants through a written information sheet (see Appendix D).

SECTION THREE: Analysis

Who? - Conversations that define gifted children

This chapter looks at the way giftedness and gifted children are defined by the participants. Interview transcripts have been analysed for language used to define giftedness and gifted children and the functions of this language. Several factors were found that were common to all interviews and these have been separated out, for ease of analysis, into 'Conversations'. Gifted children were defined in terms of their achievement (itself defined in terms of specific school criteria), their behaviour, their uniqueness and their relation to other children. These ideas have been grouped into Conversations named 'achievement-orientated', 'non-problematic', 'stand out' and 'opposition to special needs' respectively. Throughout the interviews participants also engaged in the Conversation 'on their own'. Used in combination these Conversations lead to what has been called the 'stable internal competency view' of gifted children.

Interview transcripts sometimes simultaneously presented conflicting definitions of giftedness. The same speakers would often refer to giftedness as being an unstable continuum attributable to all students in some degree (the Conversation 'variable special abilities'), while also talking about 'the gifted' as being an entity separate to 'the norm'. The simultaneous acceptance of both of these definitions is important when looking at Conversations employed to explain programmes for gifted children (as discussed in the next section). It appears that the participants held the notion that while 'special abilities' are attributable to children in varying degrees, there also exists a small group of 'truly gifted' children.

Conversation: 'The Gifted'

Many times participants spoke of 'gifted children' or 'children with special abilities' using such grammar to indicate a specific group of identifiable children separate to the majority. It is not often that the phrases 'the fingered children,' 'children with fingers,' 'children who are fingered' is heard, presumably because it is taken for granted that all children have fingers.

The need to grammatically identify a child as gifted indicates the speaker's acceptance that giftedness is not a universal characteristic and is worthy as a category of distinction between children.

Furthermore the phrases referring to gifted children illustrated giftedness as a stable attribute belonging to the child. Fairclough (1989) claims the verb 'are', used in the simple present tense form is 'a categorical commitment of the producer to the truth of the proposition' (Fairclough, 1989:129). The prerequisite to making sense of the phrases below is the acceptance that giftedness is part of a child. The phrases are all nominalisations, that is giftedness is expressed as a noun, making it an entity rather than a process (Fairclough, 1989). The children are gifted, rather than the children are being gifted, just as children are Maori, rather than being Maori.

PA: "...talented musical children..."
PD: "...special abilities children..."
PB: "...acknowledgement of her giftedness..."

PA: "...the right children..."
P:A "...the bright children..."
PA: "...the good artists..."

PE: "...a child that is gifted..."
PB: "...children who are very skilled..."
PA: "...the people who are good writers..."

If giftedness were expressed as a process it would take on a different perspective in terms of educational programming. It could be something any child could have an opportunity to do, rather than something a child either is or isn't. Giftedness as a process would insinuate a more temporary procedure open to outside influence. Expressing giftedness as a noun suggests that this attribute of giftedness is a stable one, unlikely to change. Further, making such a distinction in discourse lessens the need to make reference to neither the causality of nor the responsibility for the giftedness (Fairclough, 1989).

The frequent use of such grammatical features implies that there exists a group of children different from other children by way of their intrinsic giftedness. This notion is backed-up by the suggestion that 'non-giftedness' is also a stable quality that a child either has or has not:

PC: "the others, the children *without* those abilities"

Conversation: 'opposition to special needs'

As the interviews progressed the gifted group became further defined by their comparison to 'special needs'. Gifted children were often referred to in relation to special needs children, creating two separate groups. These two groups were then polarised as groups at the opposite end of a continuum of abilities:

PE: "...slow children and bright children..."

PB: "...far better to be bright than slow..."

PC: "...a bright child and a slow child..."

PD: "...closing the gap..."

PA: "...across the spectrum..."

PD: "...at the top and the bottom..."

PD: "...at the bottom end we do a similar thing with remedial, but you're not looking at that part of it..."

PA: "...children who have special needs at the lower end of the scale..."

Such phrases illustrate the idea of a continuum, 'gap', 'scale' or 'spectrum' of abilities that children may be slotted into. There are two ends, each end has a list of attributes:

'bottom'	'top'
'special needs'	'special abilities'
'remedial'	'gifted'
'slow'	'bright'
	'above-average'
	'good'

Each word within each list has taken on a situational meaning in the context of this discourse. The words within each list are not literal synonyms when used outside this discourse, and yet are used interchangeably throughout the interviews, suggesting an equivalent meaning (Fairclough, 1989). With one exception, the words between each list are not literal antonyms. However they are used as such within the discourse. The exception: 'top' and 'bottom' creates this polarisation of the groups that causes the situational meanings of the other words to be opposites. The choice of these words is deliberate and illustrates the political setting. Although the 'top' group may be 'good' the 'bottom' group are not described as 'bad'; this would not be "politically correct".

The words 'remedial' and 'special needs' conjurs up images of students in *need* of assistance,

help or 'remedy'. Thorburn (1994) identifies the view of people with disabilities as in need of help as the 'charity view', which she claims stems from a philanthropic Victorian era. She presents this view as oppressive because of its patronising stance which tends to enforce the opinion of professionals at the expense of the 'right' of the person. She cites Katz (1981) who found that people gave less help to disabled people when they perceived them as competent. If this is the case the gifted child has little chance of receiving assistance when defined using the labels listed above. The words associated with the gifted child do not indicate any need for support. Instead these words illustrate an achievement-orientated view of giftedness giving an impression of children who are fully competent.

Conversation: 'variable special abilities'

Discourse such as that discussed in the paragraphs above combine to illustrate a notion of giftedness as a stable quality inherent in 'the' gifted. There were, however, also instances of discourse that played against this notion of stable giftedness, for example when interviewees discussed identifying children for gifted programmes:

PD: "once the decision has been made the ones that are committed to it are locked in probably for two years of their time at school so I had some concerns about the way that was done"

PD: "...and then we would review it again for their second year with us."

If inclusion in a gifted group is subject to 'review' at a later period, and there are concerns over a gifted programme that commits students for two years, the implication is that children who were gifted in the first year may not be in the second year. Thus rather than a stable attribute, giftedness becomes a variable identifiable in degrees and changeable over time. This contradicts the previously discussed notion of a separate group of established gifted children.

PD: "I suppose I tend to come from the school that every child has some special abilities it's just a bit harder to find what they are in some children than in others..."

Here the speaker aligns him/herself personally with a presumably commonly accepted Conversation ("I suppose I tend to come from the school..") that the issue in identifying special abilities is not whether a child has 'special abilities' or not, but 'finding' what those

abilities are. In this instance the speaker does not identify whose responsibility it is to 'find' the abilities, in fact there is no suggestion that such a responsibility exists. This links to a discussion further on in this chapter on the criteria that giftedness must 'stand out.' Later the speaker refers to the difficulties of identifying special abilities:

PD: "...but there were issues in terms of identifying which children went into them and then it's, it's easy to identify a few of those students, but the ones at the margin it's very difficult to...which ones are marginally in and which ones are marginally out..."

This extract supports the idea that 'all children have special abilities' but this time the issue is not 'what' the abilities are but what degree of specialness the ability is. The idea of a 'margin' seems to work better with a definition of variable special abilities. At the same time, however, the extract supports the notion of two separate groups, gifted and non-gifted, as the theme of the text is how to select children for inclusion in either group. By trying to decide whether a child is borderline gifted or non-gifted the speaker presupposes the idea that there is such a thing as gifted and non-gifted. The selection becomes problematic when student's abilities are 'marginally' special. Separating gifted from non-gifted becomes further complicated when 'areas of giftedness' are integrated.

PD: "...if we are talking about giftedness what are we talking about? Are we talking about academic giftedness, are we talking about gifts in music, are we talking about gifts in sport, umm, gifts socially? So different children are gifted perhaps in different ways. Often we consider the academic part, but then there are other areas."

PB: "because they might be special abilities in geometry but not in number or whatever"

PC: "children with particular abilities"

So it is not only possible to be 'marginally' gifted but also a child can be gifted in one area and not in another. These latter extracts have built-up a definition of giftedness that is changing over time, available to be 'found' in all children within degrees and in differing 'areas.' This seems to contradict the previous definition of giftedness as a stable attribute. In fact the transcripts showed that the two definitions can work simultaneously:

PB: "I had a group of children, of six, one who would be in the gifted range and the others that would be serious, you know, that were special abilities"

This speaker separated 'gifted' from 'special abilities'. The distinction makes it possible that all students have special abilities while a separate group are gifted.

PB: "...a lot of the children weren't special abilities, they were just children that were good at art, or good at problem solving, or whatever"

Here the same speaker has separated out 'good' from 'special abilities' and used 'special abilities' as a stable attribute. If it is possible to say that the children 'weren't' special abilities, it should then follow that some children 'were', and there exist children who 'are' special abilities.

The previous speaker also refers to this separate group by mentioning that 'a few' children are 'easy to identify'. What makes this identification easy will be discussed further on. So we return to the idea of a separate group of inherently gifted children. However the notion of a 'range' of abilities is not abandoned. Within the group there are degrees of giftedness: some gifted children are more gifted than other gifted children:

PE: "...probably one of the most gifted children I have ever taught..."

PA: "...probably the brightest, most gifted child I've had..."

PA: "...there might be a genius somewhere..."

PD: "...bearing in mind the extremes have to come out..."

Conversation: 'extremes'

The two notions: 'the gifted' and 'every child has special abilities' are simultaneously possible when special abilities operate along a continuum, those at the 'top' end of the continuum are gifted and some children are 'extreme.'

P: "I suppose some, some would say that the truly gifted are, are the all-rounders who have skill in all those areas, umm, I think those are very few and far between in our schools, I think there are some of them, and I think they do stand out."

Here it is proposed that a small 'very few and far between' group of 'truly' gifted exist. The criteria for the group is given. The children possess ('have') skill in all areas. The children stand out and are unique in terms of population ('very few and far between'). Other references were made to the smallness of the group:

PD: "it's easy to identify a few of those students"

PE: "you don't have a lot of them"

In fact if too many children are gifted it seems to imply a problem with the identification of giftedness:

PB: {In reference to identification procedures} "Because the one I used last year, I don't think its good enough. It's too, it was too broad and there were too many children in it"

PA: "How many children in an accelerant class are actually gifted in any way is probably very debatable"

This last speaker implies that the identification of gifted children is problematic and not always successfully carried out. The same speaker often used the precursor 'deemed' to indicate one way in which a child may become associated with giftedness:

PA: "...children who are deemed to be gifted..."

PA: "...who were deemed to be bright and gifted..."

This was of particular interest when used in conjunction with the 'opposition to special needs' Conversation:

PA: "...what schools are required to do, I think, is to look at the students, identify special needs, be they slow learners, behaviour needs, children that are deemed to be gifted..."

Here gifted children are included as 'special needs' but separated out from 'slow learners' and 'behaviour needs'. Only gifted is given the precursor 'deemed'. When asked to explain further use of the word deemed:

PA: "Well, identified, or someone, people are telling me they're gifted"

Other participants echoed the idea that giftedness may be a classification given to the child through the subjective opinion of someone else.

PB: "... We have some really good children here, that are what you call gifted artists, I believe..."

PD: "...children that I see as being above average..."

So giftedness may be either available to be 'found' within a child, or it could be 'displayed' by a child, or it may be a label relegated to a student by a third party. When you describe a child's giftedness as being an arbitrary label artificially bestowed upon them from the outside

it is easier to then debate the legitimacy and validity of the label. The child is not fundamentally gifted, rather they are simply 'deemed' or 'called' gifted and as such their giftedness is more open to debate.

Similarly when special abilities are described as attributes to be 'found' in children the identification of giftedness becomes vague because "...it's just a bit harder to find what they are in some children than in others". Thus it becomes possible that some children can be gifted but not recognised as such and others can be recognised as gifted without being 'actually' or 'truly' gifted. However, the discourse simultaneously constructed and negated this possibility by enforcing the claim that in order to be 'truly' gifted you must 'stand out.'

Conversation: 'stand out'

PA: "So I think if you are gifted then somehow you've got to show that you're gifted. I'm not too much a fan of well, this person's gifted but the problem is you can't see it or something has upset them and they can't show it or they can't do it or whatever"

As we shall see this notion of 'stand out' is specifically defined within this particular discourse and is closely linked to identification.

PC: "They do self identify, in a way, by their achievements"

To be identified gifted students must display their gifts and this must be done in a certain way. They can 'stand out' in terms of high all-round achievement at specific school selected criteria and they can 'stand out' in terms of their behaviour. Particular behavioural expectations are built into the definition and identification of gifted children. One participant explained these expectations:

PB: "And you would expect they would be the shining light in the classrooms, if you like, right the way through"

I: "*Explain 'the shining light'*"

PB: "Well they're the child that, you know, when you give, when you're maybe in a discussion in a class the kid, the child gets what you're saying. They go to put their hand up and give the, not the right answer because there can be many right answers, but there may be a child when you set them work, I've got one in my room, it's always beautifully presented, its always done exactly, you know, the way you expect to be done, and umm, and they may be a nice person as well. Kids that are kind to other children, I think it's a whole lot of qualities too."

In this statement inclusion in a gifted programme is defined quite specifically. The child must conform to teacher expectations in terms of their school work and must display appropriate social skills with peers. The participants' explanation of "shining light" gives specific clues as to what constitutes gifted behaviour. A child must 'get what you're saying,' that is they must understand the teacher on the teacher's level. The gifted child must participate in a certain way, they must 'put their hand up and answer'. They must 'present' work 'beautifully' and they must be 'nice', which is defined as 'kind to other children.'

The voice of authority is clear in this extract. The child must present work the way the teacher expects it to be done, and understand what the teacher is saying. So although there are 'many right answers' a child who does not complete work to the way the teacher expects nor 'gets' what the teacher is saying would not be considered gifted. The child must be 'kind to other children,' but there is no mention of a reciprocal requirement.

Within this extract the notion of stable giftedness is used: 'right the way through', 'always.' The child is required to display the expected behaviour consistently. Including behavioural requirements in a definition of giftedness makes the possibility of gifted underachievers and gifted children with behavioural problems problematic. Each interview reference to gifted children with behavioural problems was qualified in some way.

Conversation: 'non-problematic'

PB: "...although they can be very difficult children behaviourally I believe, so, not the ones I've seen haven't been, but yeah"

PA: "It's interesting in this booklet there's a whole page on gifted children who for some reason are missing out. *Who are withdrawn, they're naughty, they're not being recognised, their needs are not being acknowledged.* I'm not denying they exist somewhere, but the vast majority of children are doing well"

The speaker here uses overwording to express the importance of the message. He is surprised that not a page but a 'whole page' is devoted to this issue. He stresses that not the majority but the 'vast majority' of children are doing well. Fairclough (1989) suggests that overwording "shows a preoccupation with some aspect of reality – which may indicate an ideological struggle" (p. 115). The use of the word 'interesting' also suggests such a struggle. This word is used commonly in a modern context when a speaker wishes to politely

introduce a point of potential debate. The last sentence begins 'I'm not denying they exist somewhere': a negation of an accusation that was never made linguistically. To make logical cohesion of this paragraph the listener interprets that there is reasonable debate of the existence of gifted children who are 'missing out'.

The second sentence (*italics*) lists the components of this group of children. The first two are described as attributes of the children (the children *are* withdrawn, they *are* naughty); however, the second two are listed as processes (they are not *being* recognised, their needs are not *being* acknowledged). One interpretation of the cohesive structure of this sentence could be that the principal is implying that the attributes and processes link together. By listing them in this way, without the use of 'or,' the principal is using 'withdrawal,' 'naughtiness,' 'non-recognition' and 'un-met needs' as synonyms. The speaker may be suggesting that withdrawal and naughtiness are the result of non-recognition and un-met needs. The next sentence then, which claims naughty and withdrawn gifted children are a minority therefore simultaneously implies that schools that don't recognise nor meet the needs of gifted children are also a minority. However, if operating under a definition of gifted children as those who have a history of achievement and display appropriate behaviour then it is unlikely that 'naughty' or 'withdrawn' will be included as gifted. Thus, automatically 'the vast majority are doing very well,' as that is the very reason they have been identified as gifted.

One participant did acknowledge behavioural problems may occur and was 'interestingly' gender specific:

PB [on identifying gifted children]: "...and behaviour is another one, because some of the boys can be quite naughty"

then later went on to expand on the nature of these problems:

PB: "because unfortunately with some of these children they do get the view that they're, you know, actually quite special and a bit apart from the rest of the, the human race and they can display other characteristics, unkindness and things like that also happens. Which I don't think they should get away with just because they happen to be cleverer than two-thirds of the world."

In this statement the speaker uses extremes to emphasise the message. The children are 'apart from' 'the rest of the human race' and are 'cleverer' than 'two thirds of the world.' It is interesting that what the speaker seems to be objecting to is the children's own

acknowledgement of their giftedness. She states that it is 'unfortunate' that the children 'get the view' that they are 'actually quite special' and 'a bit apart from the rest of the human race.' Throughout the interview, however, the speaker helped to incorporate the components of uniqueness and difference from others into the very definition of giftedness. Other interview extracts have illustrated that in order to be identified as gifted children must 'stand out' from other children, and must display 'special' abilities through achievement.

The problem this speaker identifies is not that the children are special and apart from the rest but that the children 'get the view' that they are these things. This is reasoned to be a problem because the children get the view 'and' then can display 'other characteristics' (such as unkindness). By using 'and' to link the two ideas the speaker implies that it is the knowledge of their own giftedness that causes the unkindness.

Usage of the words 'other' and 'also' indicates that this unkindness is a characteristic separate to the child's giftedness – these characteristics are 'other characteristics', that is: other to the characteristics associated with their giftedness. So although 'these children' can display such characteristics as unkindness it is not a part of their giftedness, it is instead a result of their knowledge of their giftedness.

Furthermore the speaker states that due to the very fact of their giftedness 'these children' should not be allowed to display the unwanted characteristics: they should not 'get away with it' 'because' they are 'cleverer.' Thus, although improper behaviour (in this case characteristics such as unkindness) is an 'unfortunate' result of a child having knowledge of their own giftedness, it is not acceptable in a gifted child. In fact this last sentence presupposes the idea that a gifted child would try to 'get away with it' under the guises of their giftedness.

The reason why a gifted child should not be allowed to display knowledge of their giftedness is linked to yet another aspect in the definition of giftedness. This time giftedness is an accidental attribute: the children 'happen to be' gifted. The giftedness is not the fault of the child, nor the result of any other party. Therefore the child should not be allowed to act upon something that is not a result of their own actions.

The display of specific behaviour is a significant element of the definition of a gifted child,

but it is only one component. There is also a necessary level of measured 'academic' achievement.

Conversation: 'achievement-orientated'

PB: "...but they have to be children, too, that actually produce the work to a high level"

PB: "...and when I say highly I suppose I would mean in the top 5%. And then you get them in doing their PATs and they're in the 98.99 aged percentile right the way through"

This statement gives a cut off point on the continuum ("top 5%") where children who have special abilities become gifted. The phrase 'right the way through' may be a reference to stable giftedness, or in this case may imply an 'all-rounder'. To be 'truly' gifted the achievement must be 'all-round,' that is children must show consistent achievement in a selection of areas - academics, the arts and social skills:

PD: "...school productions where some of our children with special abilities take leading roles there. Interestingly some of the ones who do very well there are ones who do well in homeroom group programmes as well, so it's that all-rounder concept again."

PE [On identifying gifted children]: "It would just be really looking at the child overall in the school, how they're coping, you know, are they showing leadership, are they taking part in plays, and things like that..."

So 'achievement,' (as opposed to 'potential') is an important part of the definition. When potential is discussed it is measured in terms of past achievement:

PB: "...we always look at our PATs to pick the children, because we also do the Australian English and Maths here. But I guess you could measure it the following year maybe, if you had a child that had come from someone and you found them to be not working to their potential."

PC: "...if they've achieved highly in Year 2, they're still achieving highly in Year 3..."

Thus, students must first achieve highly to be considered to have the potential to achieve highly.

PB: "I actually believe that gifted children ...are very good at actually showing you that they are gifted and achieving"

In this sentence the children are already gifted and show this by what they are already achieving. It is important to note that throughout the interviews the word 'achievement' is used constantly by principals but is never specifically defined. Principals do not feel the need to define 'achievement,' it is taken for granted that the audience will hold a common definition of this word. In this context, however, achievement holds a specific meaning. The interviewer assumes that achievement in this context refers to the child's ability to demonstrate mastery of specific standards at a specific age. These standards are related to what both schools and society have determined as important to have mastered at a certain age. As such this meaning of achievement is cultural and ideological, yet principals assume a universal meaning.

When giftedness is attributed to children based on previous or current achievement (as measured by particular school expectations) and is defined as stable over time it follows that these children are going to continue with their success regardless; they will succeed 'on their own.'

Conversation: 'on their own'

The Conversation 'on their own' has been identified by many writers (see Clark, 1997; Cox, 1993; Linzer Swartz, 1994; Silverman, 1997; Townsend & Patrick, 1996) and was discussed in the previous section. The use of this Conversation was evident in most interviews, for example:

PB: "...because with a bright child they're going to do well anyway"

PD: "We know the ones with special abilities will survive and survive very very well"

There was however one exception. One participant made direct reference of the existence of such a Conversation in order to oppose it.

PC: "...because they do need guidance, they're too often just left to get on with, to their own devices, and I don't think that that's the way at all to address what they need".

This Conversation was most commonly used for the justification of the allocation of resources. If the success of a gifted child is predetermined it was then argued that they are not in 'need' of limited resources that could be used elsewhere. This will be discussed in the

next chapter.

Potential that is defined by previous achievement feeds the 'on their own' Conversation. If employing a definition of gifted as children who have already shown success (as defined by set criteria) without assistance then it is likely that those children will continue to succeed without assistance. When children with behavioural problems or underachievers are excluded from the definition of giftedness then giftedness itself becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This analysis has shown a discourse employed by principals that most commonly defines gifted children as those children who have already succeeded at school determined criteria, within the current school system and who are likely to continue to do so. Such children are viewed as achievement-orientated and non-problematic. These combined Conversations lead to the 'stable internal competency view' of gifted, a definition of giftedness which has direct implications on the programming decisions of principals. The next section identifies Conversations employed by principals when discussing programming issues. These Conversations are related to the 'stable internal competency view' of gifted.

What and Why? - Conversations on programming decisions

When discussing the reasons for choice of school programming for gifted children, a number of issues were identified. The reasons given can be grouped into three main Conversations: 'philosophy,' 'restrictions' and 'outside pressure'. Initially principals discussed programming choice as being related to their personal philosophy regarding withdrawal or mainstreaming programmes. Principals espoused a positive 'belief' in mainstreaming and withdrawal programmes were discussed in negative terms both philosophically and from an organisational perspective. More frequently, however, a programming decision was linked to some kind of restriction which limited the choice of programmes in some way. Such limitations included a lack of resourcing or funding, shortage of time, disruption to other programmes, or difficulty of implementation. The 'restriction' Conversation was linked to the 'needs' Conversation to create a Conversation of educational 'priorities.' The educational needs of gifted students were prioritised against the needs of other students, in particular special-needs children.

Conversation: 'philosophy'

Principals described the gifted programmes currently practised in their schools as being either 'mainstream' or 'withdrawal' programmes. Participants identified these two as alternatives and discussed their choice between them in 'philosophical' terms. The dominant belief was easily identifiable. Mainstream programmes, or programmes that provided for gifted children within a mainstream classroom, were always discussed positively.

PD: "I think it's best for the children to stay with their home room teacher."

PE: "I'm a mainstreaming person"

PA: "I believe mainstreaming philosophically is sound"

Principals gave research and experience as a backing for their personal 'belief' in mainstream programmes:

PD: " Well it stems, it extends from a number of quarters, it extends from experience, it extends from, um, I was going to say from research but, um, I can't quote the research and , arh, you could probably quote an equivalent amount of research that would support the opposing view."

References to withdrawal programmes were always negative in terms of the principal's

personal beliefs:

PD: "They had a number of programmes for children with special abilities, most of which were withdrawal programmes and I could see some problems with that"

PE: "In general I don't support the concept of withdrawal for gifted programs..."

PA: "...so I don't think I'm in favour of massive withdrawal..."

Part of the reasoning for the dislike of withdrawal were a number of 'problems' such programmes caused. Problems associated with withdrawal programmes included organisational factors:

PD: "In mathematics we do run an accelerate programme. The way we do that, to try and minimise the disruption elements..."

In this sentence the principal is pointing out that 'disruption' is an important organisational problem stemming from withdrawal programmes, one which must be considered in the planning of programming for gifted children. In this instance 'disruption' is not defined in terms of who or what is being disrupted. However in a later statement the same principal discussed the amount of time students needed to commit to withdrawal programmes as a problem:

PD: "...but again, to do it effectively you're needing a minimum of two, two and a half hours a week to actually, um, give them the time that they need. If you give them that where do you find the time, what are they missing in the home-class during that time, that's a significant amount of time in terms of other aspects of the programme."

Here the time required to conduct programmes for gifted children is an important factor because of what the students might otherwise be doing with that time. The amount of time is specified, two to two and a half hours is 'significant'. This is considered the amount of time needed for an 'effective' programme, yet too much time to spend away from the home-class. The message is that whatever is happening in the home-class is too important to keep the child away from for such a length of time. So the idea of a prioritisation of schooling activities comes into play. Not only were home-room educational activities prioritised over withdrawal programmes, but home-room socialisation was said to be of higher importance.

PD: "but often it was at the expense of them missing out on something else or of them being in the home group with their other age peers."

Here the principal has identified the importance of children working with their age peers and pitted it against the importance of specific withdrawal programmes for gifted children.

Gifted children being with their age peers is so important that it causes the notion of withdrawal to be problematic.

Although principals spoke of their personal belief in inclusive programmes and a dislike of withdrawal programmes their description of programmes in practice included both approaches. Principals repeatedly recognised that their beliefs did not always translate directly into school practice:

PD: "my beliefs are compromised in a couple of ways"

PE: "so in a way it's a compromise in the belief in cross-class grouping and not cross-class grouping"

PC: "so it's a bit of a compromise in beliefs to achieve that but, (p)"

The definition of giftedness as a continuum of abilities helped explain this incongruence as withdrawal programmes were said to be necessary for the 'extremes'.

PD: "So I don't think I'm in favour of massive withdrawal, but then having said that, I mean there might be a genius somewhere who needs to be withdrawn."

PA: "bearing in mind the extremes have to come out of the mainstream"

By referring to the extremes the principal is employing the notion of giftedness being attributable in degrees. A 'genius' 'needs' to be withdrawn and 'the extremes' 'have to' come out of the mainstream. This sentence builds the premise that mainstream education is not designed for nor should be required to cater for 'the extremes.' Neither 'genius' nor 'extreme' is defined, giving the principal lee-way to decide upon each individual child's 'need' for withdrawal subjectively. The principal has also qualified her claim of non-approval of withdrawal programmes. She is not 'in favour of' 'massive' withdrawal, but says withdrawal is necessary in some circumstances. Other participants qualified their lack of support for withdrawal programmes in a similar way:

PD: '*In general* I don't support the concept of withdrawal for gifted programs'

PE: "...we don't have *big* withdrawal programs..."

Withdrawal programmes were, nonetheless, judged to be successful. Principals identified student achievement as the basis for determining the success of a programme for gifted children. Again (as with the definition of 'giftedness') it was specific academic achievement which was important.

PD: [In reference to an accelerate withdrawal programme] "since first entering the

***competition we've had at least one student top in New Zealand every year since 1992...so I know that, because of the external measures, I know that that programme is successful, so that encourages me to keep going".

In this instance the success the student/s have had, in terms of achievement on a specified measurement, is an indication of 'programme success.' The programme is successful if the children achieve and this convinces the principal the programme should continue. This assumption is inconsistent with the Conversation 'on their own'. If the children achieve 'on their own' then their success is not an indicator of programme success. In fact if the children were able to achieve on their own the programme should be unnecessary. The fact that the principal links student achievement to programme success suggests that the programme is both necessary and responsible for student achievement. Gifted students need specific programmes to achieve highly.

Maintaining both conflicting Conversations allow principals flexibility in the rationalisation of programming choices. By associating programme success with a pre-determined standard of student success the principal is able to rationalise status-quo programme choices. Meanwhile the Conversation 'on their own' is combined with 'restrictions' to enable students' 'needs' to be prioritised in a certain manner which also helps maintain the status-quo. Principals can justify a small range of withdrawal programmes (because of their 'success') while opposing an increase in these programmes in the name of restricted resources and priority of 'need' (this will be discussed later in this chapter).

It should be noted that achievement on a specified test or academic measurement is not the only way of determining programme success. But principals did not mention student emotional stability or contentment as an indicator of programme success. The fact that these things were not considered as methods of programme evaluation suggests that they were not part of the goals of such programmes. This is a consequence of operating under a narrow definition of gifted children. Gifted students are defined as academically-orientated, achievement orientated and non-problematic children. Consequently gifted programmes deal only with specific academic goals rather than taking a 'whole-person' approach.

Thus, although withdrawal programmes were acceptable if carried out on a small scale for extreme cases, and do indeed carry some measure of success, mainstream inclusive programming was the preferred ideal. However, principals' personal beliefs were not the

only factor in programming decisions and sometimes had to give way to the variety of 'restrictions' that limited programming choice.

Conversation: 'restrictions'

PB: "I mean I do think the teachers here probably do try and extend children, but, um, I don't know, it's just, it's just sometimes a bit hard"

PA: "To a large extent we try to individualise programmes in the classroom and I don't say that glibly. That's a really important thing that teachers try to do. That's for everybody. Now bearing in mind though, we have classes of nearly thirty, or thirty in the upper school. That's very difficult."

Here the principal introduces the idea of qualifying circumstances that makes practice independent of philosophical ideals. The ideal in this case is individualised programmes and the principal stresses the importance of such through overwording ('to a large extent', 'I don't say that glibly' and 'that's a really important thing') while still using a qualifier: 'try.' This qualifier introduces the Conversation of 'restrictions' that act as barriers in the achievement of individualised programmes. In this case it is the number of children within a classroom makes such practice 'very difficult'. A lack of resourcing/funding, shortage of time, disruption to other programmes or other children, and the difficulty of implementation were other factors identified as limiting to programme options.

PA: "The government would say they are being adequately catered for. We all know they could be better catered for, and if there were more resources that would be good"

In this statement the principal states gifted children could be 'better catered for' but does not directly point to responsibility or causality. Both, however, are implied by the cohesive techniques employed in the discourse. The government is mentioned firstly and is paraphrased. The government has been associated with a view which is then critiqued in the second sentence. The speaker now uses the word 'we' inclusively to align this second opinion with both the immediate audience and the wider community while at the same time opposing the government's opinion. In this way the speaker's perspective is given double credibility as not only is it presented as common to the community, but it is also opposite to the government (often a target of cynicism).

The two ideas in the second sentence are joined with 'and'. In this way the speaker implies

that more resources would help students to be better catered for. When linked back to the first sentence the impression is that the government could help with this provision of resources but does not because they believe it unnecessary. So the principal has acknowledged insufficient educational provision for gifted children but has negated his personal responsibility for the cause or rectification of this situation by aligning himself sympathetically to his audience and assigning blame to the government, an untouchable authority.

PB: "It's a matter of the resourcing we have. If we had more resourcing then maybe we could look at something different"

PA: "Given our resources at this school things are just about right. Whether nationally things are about right I don't know. That depends on value judgements and to what extent you allocate opportunity and resources across the spectrum"

In this extract the Conversation of 'restrictions' is used directly as a rationalisation of programming choices. In the first sentence the principal uses the school's level of resources as a qualifying measurement of programme adequacy. In this way any criticism of programming can be referred back to the Conversation of 'restrictions.'

In the last sentence the principal states the allocation of resources is a 'value judgement.' This sentence can be related to the Conversation of 'priorities.' The sentence makes sense only when the listener understands a number of assumptions the speaker has taken for granted. The 'value judgement' the principal is referring to is that of the *choice* of resource allocation. By using the phrase 'across the spectrum' the principal is employing a definition of ability in degrees and fuelling the notion of opposition between special needs and special abilities. The word 'spectrum' conjures images of a range of student abilities from one 'end' to another. The assumption is that choice of resource allocation is made on the basis of this 'spectrum.' By tying 'value judgement' to 'spectrum' the principal is enforcing the idea that resource allocation is not a matter of equal amounts to individual students, rather it is a choice dependent on a child's place within the spectrum.

The 'restrictions' Conversation also includes the limited availability of time:

I: "*Do you see any barriers in getting that programme up and running?*"

PB: "Time"

Time restrictions meant that teachers weren't able to organise programmes due to other commitments.

PB: [In reference to I's question: "Do you think schools are catering well for gifted students?"] "Well, I think they've got so much else to do that they just go, its one of those things, we'll start it, and we'll start it. I mean we have done that this year, put it off, and you put if off, and you put it off."

The organisation of gifted programmes are 'put off' because schools have got 'so much else to do.' This makes sense when the listener understands that time is limited and thus not everything a school has to do actually can be done. The implication is that the other things a school has to do can not be 'put off' the way gifted programmes can. Gifted programmes were not the only educational programmes 'put off' because of other priorities.

PB: "it's like teachers don't teach music or phys. ed. if the programme gets too full"

The idea of prioritisation also came into play when discussing funding. The problem was not that schools had no funds to allocate to gifted education, rather that those that were allocated were more likely to be used in other areas.

PB: "We're meant to, I think, cater for them out of our SEG grant, but that's not big enough anyway, and the problem is in a school like ours, well we get children brought here, because of the way we deal with special needs, they suck up all our SEG grant."

This statement is interesting in that it gives causality to the process of the use of limited funds, something that previous statements have avoided. The speaker remarks that it is *special needs children* that 'suck up' the money, not the school, teachers nor government that decides how the money is spent. This gives the impression that there has been little choice made by the school or teachers, that what happens is beyond the speaker's personal control. The speaker is relying on the listener's commonsense understanding that SEG money should be automatically allocated to special needs. However, later in the interview the speaker raises the same point, but then goes on to personalise the responsibility (see the use of 'I' below).

PB: "because I think, the reality is that, special needs sucks up all the money. That in a school like mine I would put the money into that not special abilities. Because I see those children as being more needy, or it might be that, it might be that the classroom teachers are going to be far more stressed if I don't put the teacher's aide in with them."

In the first extract the speaker has introduced the idea of different schools having a differing base of student types. The principal presents her school as being one to which special needs

children are 'brought,' then presents the use of the SEG grant as a natural consequence of this. In this statement the principal repeats that the nature of the school (in terms of its student base) serves as reasoning for the allocation of the SEG grant.

The speaker now refers to funding allocation as a personal decision and gives the basis for the decision: special needs children are *more* 'needy,' and *more* stressful, therefore they are allocated funds at the expense of gifted programmes. This quote also demonstrates the use of Conversations to build a definition of gifted children as discussed in the previous chapter. The speaker separates gifted from special needs (and, one can surmise, from 'normal') as 'either/or' exclusive groups. This separation, combined with the 'restrictions' Conversation, opens the way for competition between the two - the limited funds can go to either one or the other. Special needs students are presented as being 'far more' stressful to teachers - 'far more' than gifted students is the inference. This makes sense if the listener employs a definition of gifted children as 'non-problematic' children and works under the assumption that a special needs student's failure to achieve is more significant than a gifted student's failure to reach their potential.

Another extract from a different participant also employs these Conversations when explaining competition between the 'needs' of children. In this case the principal is discussing the allocation of time to 'social issues' as being in competition with time spent on gifted programmes. Once again this principal discussed the type of school (in this case its decile rating) as if it was a natural factor in the process of programming choice.

PA: "This is a low decile school, it's a decile 3 school, there's a huge amount of time goes into social issues. Which is a concern, and we have to make sure that this is not at the expense of children who don't have social issues and are here to learn and get on with their programme"

I: *"And does gifted education fall into that group, the children who don't have social issues?"*

PA: "Well, gifted children, their educational issues and educational needs wouldn't fall, they might do, there might be a family upset and concern that this, because they're gifted doesn't mean there is not a family concern and a social issue. And yet gifted education is an educational issue rather than a social one".

In this extract the principal is reluctant to relate gifted children with social issues. The two are separate. The speaker separates social issues from gifted education, while at the same time relating social issues to the decile rating of the school, implying gifted education is

incompatible with a low-decile community. Gifted children are talked of as being purely academically orientated (“are here to learn”). Their achievement of this goal is said to be potentially obstructed by the amount of time needed to deal with the ‘social issues’ of other children resulting from the low-decile nature of the community.

Conversation: ‘need’

These extracts show how programming decisions are linked to a variety of Conversations. Principals’ philosophical beliefs are considered, but organisational ‘restrictions’ are also factors influencing programming choice. The Conversation of ‘restrictions’ is used in combination with the notion of the ‘need’ to explain a prioritisation of educational programming. The ‘need’ of a child determines the amount of resourcing allocated.

PB: “well, quite often those children are the ones who just get on and do their work. Maybe, they’re not so, umm, needy as the children in the class of twenty-nine that, you know, you’ve got three that can’t do the work that you’re setting the class and you have to devise a new programme.”

In this extract the level of achievement is not important, students are simply required to ‘do’ the work. The paragraph demonstrates the approach taken when considering programming. Children are assessed according to their ‘need’ and this need is prioritised and used to decide the allocation of restricted resources. Furthermore ‘need’ is related to how the child ‘fits in’ to the situation, which is determined by the extent of ‘problems’:

PB: “my belief is that these children fit in with just a bit of extra work, they’re not a problem.”

The definition of gifted children as non-problematic achievers who will succeed on their own allows principals to rationalise a low prioritisation of gifted programmes. Furthermore ‘need’ is assessed in terms of a glass-ceiling of achievement. Achievement levels are pre-determined by the school and used to measure educational need. Once this level is met ‘need’ becomes ‘extra’. Need is assessed and ranked according to ‘priorities.’

Conversation: ‘priorities’

The extracts above have not discussed the ‘needs’ of student in terms of *what* is needed, but

rather, in terms of how important the need is. When the needs of gifted students are discussed they are done so in terms of their relation to the needs of other students, in particular special needs students. Special needs students are 'more needy', gifted students are 'not so needy'. Implicit in such phrases is the assumption that need can be prioritised. Some need is greater than other need. The 'stable internal competency view' combined with the Conversation of 'restrictions' assists with the prioritisation of 'need', when 'need' is related to achievement. Gifted students have already achieved, and are likely to continue achieving. Therefore their 'need' (for achievement) has been satisfied, so limited resources may be used elsewhere.

The prioritisation of gifted issues was referred to explicitly by one principal:

PA: "Given that [gifted education] is not a priority"

PA: "Central government has been very good in the last few years of setting the priorities. Gifted Ed hasn't been one of them"

When referring to this prioritisation process the principal has in the first instance neglected to include an agent in the process, and in the second instance has implicated the government as responsible for prioritisation. This is an example of the Conversation of 'outside pressure' being used to delegate the responsibility of catering for gifted children.

Conversation: 'outside pressure'

Principals sometimes described a programming decision as relating to outside pressure upon the school to operate in a certain way. Two main agents - the government and parents - were identified as the sources of such pressure

PB: "I suppose people would do something, in a way, if they knew they had to. You know, it might be a cycle where they know that the government's going to make them do it and it's going to be looked at so therefore they're going to make the government give them the stuff that's going to make them do it. You know, so it's almost a cyclic thing."

This extract highlights the speaker's belief that the government has some responsibility in terms of gifted education. In this case it is up to the government to exert pressure onto schools by way of obligation. This, the principal says, would act as a catalyst for schools to increase their pressure back onto the government to provide resources to enable schools to

carry out those obligations. Schools are motivated into action by state demands, and in turn demand action from the state.

PB: "often what makes you do it, it's someone else, it could be ERO coming in saying..(p)..and that's why they're good. I believe they do valuable things in schools ninety-nine percent of the time. They make you look at what you're doing, whether you like it or not. You have to refine it and do it. So it's just having a bit of pressure applied."

Here the principal reinforces the idea that the driving force behind policy reflection and implementation is outside pressure. In this case the pressure comes from the government agency Education Review Office (ERO). However, other principals questioned the dedication of ERO to gifted issues:

PD: "There isn't the drive from the Ministry that there use to be. ERO certainly is only interested in questions, not the answers. So, um, unless teacher-groups themselves or interest groups from parents are re-established, some kind of interest group, it's not going to happen."

In this case, in the absence of 'drive' from the Ministry, it is left to teacher or parent 'interest groups' to ensure issues in gifted education are attended to, the presumption being an understanding that gifted issues will not be attended to by schools without some kind of external pressure. These statements support the delegation of responsibility for gifted programmes to government and community, as it seems a natural understanding that schools will not act without pressure from these groups. Government re-delegation back onto schools was, however, objectionable. The lack of direct enforcement of policy from the government was spoken of in dissenting terms by most principals who seemed to regard it as an avoidance of responsibility.

PB: "Because I just think the government divests itself of any responsibility in a lot of educational matters."

PB: "...and so they [the government] just divested themselves and I think they make the noises but they really are saying 'you do it yourself'."

PD: "...and I suppose it's already indicated the government has a nice easy response now in that the money is provided and it's up to the school to determine how it's used."

I: "*Pass the buck?*"

PD: "that's right, self-managing schools, when it suits."

Such discourse reinforces the idea that it is the government's duty to ensure gifted issues are attended to. Another statement demonstrates this:

PC: "I don't think schools **are given** a lot of information on it".

The fact that schools need to be 'given' information indicates that the responsibility is located elsewhere. Expressing responsibility for gifted education as a multi-party issue affords principals a disclaimer in terms of actual practice. They haven't been 'given' enough information/resources/funding. Others (the government, ERO) don't provide enough support. Plus any problems arising from actual practice can be referred back to these agents: the school is merely responding to outside pressure.

When 'outside pressure' was discussed in terms of parents and community, principals were ambiguous in their discourse. In some cases 'lobby groups' or 'vocal' parents were seen as a necessary and positive influence:

PB: "one of the mothers was extremely vocal about making sure her child was catered for, which was good for me".

PA: "like with all facets of education there are people who push particular beliefs and understanding. Each sector of education has their lobby groups. Which I guess is good because it keeps people focused".

In other cases parents were described as pushy. After being invited by the interviewer to discuss personal experiences with gifted children one principal began a narrative of two children he had worked with. The narrative is significant in many ways, one of which is its reference to the children's parents as a means of explaining the child's behaviour:

PA: "I had two boys at the same time...they were both very talented, gifted in maths particularly, and language. One boy was pushed by his mother particularly, probably Mum and Dad, but especially Mother. He was very difficult to, well not difficult, he was a bit, at times he was difficult to teach because he would not try anything that he didn't know he could do. I had first hand experience, I was working with him on a computer and learning addition when he was six. If he knew what he was doing and knew how to do it he would, he was fine. As soon as I pushed him into the unknown he'd back off....The other boy, his parents were, they worked at the University of Auckland. They were the opposite. They encouraged him and helped him, just treated him like anyone else. And he achieved higher and was more confident; attempted more and was a better achiever".

This passage illustrates a number of Conversations at work. The two children are defined as 'talented' and 'gifted', one however is problematic (although the principal is reluctant to confirm this and settles on 'at times he was a bit difficult to teach) while the other 'achieved higher' because of he was 'more confident' and 'attempted more'. The narrative explains that

what made one problematic and the other 'a better achiever' was the difference in parenting. One parent 'pushed' and in the story this leads to the difficulty in teaching. The other parents (whose occupation in another educational institution is pointed out) 'encouraged' and 'helped', which the story says is the 'opposite' of pushing. Furthermore these successful parents 'treated him like anyone else.' The way this phrase is situated in the narrative it too becomes an antonym for pushiness. The moral of the story is clear, pushing your child will result in problems, 'encouraging' and 'helping' your child, and treating him the same as others, leads to success.

There is however one logical linguistic anomaly in the story which highlights the cultural context of 'pushiness' which the principal is employing. The principal states that he himself 'pushed' the child. In this case however the pushing is part of an educational strategy. The principal is pushing into the unknown, and is disappointed that the child would 'back off'. This is clear because the description of the instance of pushing and backing off is incorporated into the story to illustrate the problematic nature of the child. This would only work if backing off is problematic and pushing is a positive educational strategy.

Conjecture would say the principal was in fact 'encouraging' and 'helping' the child, to which the child failed to respond due to his problematic nature which was caused by parental pushiness. Where does this conjecture come from? It stems from a cultural model of the word 'pushy' and its pre-established use with the parents of gifted children. The principal is assuming that the interviewer, a primary school teacher experienced in working with gifted children, will have had experience with gifted children whose parents are pushy, and so he may use the word 'push' in respect of a parent with one meaning and in respect of his own practice with a separate meaning and not have to explicitly distinguish between the two.

The nature of the community of parents of gifted children was generalised in such a way throughout the interviews. Parents of gifted children were 'strong', and 'vocal', their collective interests were 'lobby groups' and they were attracted by the 'glamour' of giftedness. These characteristics afforded to the collective of parents of gifted children meant that comments on the group's role in 'outside pressure' acquired cynical overtones.

PA: "I know intermediates in recent years have moved away from streaming but gone towards accelerant classes. Now I think that is probably in a response to parent desires. It's wonderful, your child is in an accelerant class, isn't that wonderful".

This principal has made a judgement on the practice of other schools. She has presented the proposition that other schools base programming decisions on parent wishes. The principal then makes a rather cynical comment in regards to the motivation of those parental desires. The relationship between school practice and parent desires is acknowledged but in this case parental pressure is given a negative connotation. The parents wish schools to undertake accelerant classes so that they may enjoy the wonder of their child's participation in them. One principal commented on a perceived link between government interest in gifted issues and such characteristics of parents of gifted children.

PB: "I think it's an area that the government could get good votes on, if they were smart, too. Because I do think it's an area that people with gifted children feel is neglected and I think they are strong people usually. Strong parents. And I think, you know, it would be a, um, you know, an elitist sort of vote, sort-of-thing for them. I think if they used their brains they could actually get a lot out of it. Because I think it's an area that people, it's a little bit glamorous really, you know, having a gifted child."

Parents of gifted children are said to be 'strong' people who feel their children's needs are neglected and who enjoy the 'glamour' of having a gifted child. The strong nature of parents of gifted children is related to their usefulness to the government in terms of votes.

Presumably these parents are ones who will take action in the form of exercising their voting rights should they feel their child is neglected, which according to this principal they do.

When discussing his school's own relationship with the community, parental satisfaction with the school's practice was noted, and the indication used was lack of 'problems' with parents.

PC: "we have never had any problem with any programme we have put in place. Parents are supportive".

However the same participant also said,

PC: "I haven't actually asked the community here, I mean they may say it's okay, but, yeah"

So the claim of parental support is made on the basis that no parents have come forth to complain, yet no formal consultation has taken place. The principal is acting on the assumption that all parents are equally a) informed of their student's progress, b) informed of the school's practice, c) in possession of pertinent information on the value of their child's educational experiences, d) aware of avenues for feedback to the school and e) capable and

willing to enter into dialogue with the school without invitation. All of these conditions are necessarily taken for granted in order for the statement of lack of parental complaint to act as a testimony as to the success of the school's practice. When parental feedback is needed to be used to illustrate a different perspective these assumptions are challenged:

PD: "I suppose, um, consultation with the community is fine, so long as people have sufficient knowledge"

In this instance the relevance of parental/community input is based on the level of information the community has before the consultation takes place. The speaker does not signify responsibility for informing the community, and the phrase 'sufficient' knowledge is vague. This leaves the speaker free to decide the relevance of community input arbitrarily. Another principal commented on the question of community's level of information:

PB: "but the public have no idea about funding or lack of or anything, because unless it affects you directly, you know, you have a child that is gifted, that's in a classroom, that's being ignored, you don't know what it's like do you, really, I suppose."

Again this extract serves to play down the relevance of wider community input. The 'public' have 'no idea'. The speaker states this as a nominalisation; a process phrased as a noun, but does go on to explain why the public has no idea. It is because it does not effect them directly. Those that do have a gifted child who is being ignored may have an idea, but they are not the 'public.'

Another principal down-played the relevance of community input by stating that in his experience issues which are raised by some are 'overplayed':

PA: "I think that this issue about they're not looked after and they're ignored, and they sit in a corner and don't get taught, is in my experience largely overplayed."

I: "*Overplayed by who?*"

PA: "Overplayed by the people who are lobbying for more resources or time or acknowledgement of gifted kids. Now I'm basing that on schools I've been in and the schools that I know, I realise that but, yes, this school is set up for achievement, and if you can achieve you fit in extremely well."

Once again the principal's judgement of the success of gifted programmes is the school's pre-determined standard's of achievement. This principal's school caters well for gifted students because it is 'set up for achievement'. It is then up to the student to 'fit in' through

achieving: 'if you can achieve you fit in extremely well'. Students included in the principal's view of 'gifted' have been pre-selected using a 'stable internal competency view'. Since the principal has employed a narrow definition of gifted her 'experiences' are confined to the limits of this narrow definition. These narrow experiences are used as judgement of the issues raised by others. The principal has never experienced gifted children who are 'not looked after', 'ignored' or 'sit in a corner and don't get taught' (possibly because she would not consider these children to be part of the gifted community) therefore such issues are 'over-played' by people who want 'more.'

This analysis presents the hypothesis that principals tend to discuss the parents of gifted children as a collective and afford this group a number of generalisations. The characteristics may change however, when the function of the discussion changes. When parental input is needed as a means of 'outside pressure', and used to delegate responsibility of gifted education, parents are portrayed as a 'strong', 'vocal' and 'elite'. When principals need to down-play the relevance of community input parents are portrayed as 'pushy', motivated by the 'glamour' of giftedness and ill-informed.

The Conversation of 'outside pressure' as a catalyst for programming decisions acts as a diversion of schools' responsibility to its gifted students by delegating that responsibility. If a school is acting under duress from its funder, or simply responding to parent desires it can not be held fully responsible for the extent or structure of its gifted programmes. However the principals did not completely excuse themselves or schools from responsibility for gifted programmes. One of the questions asked by the interviewer which prompted the responses above was:

I: "Do you think schools are doing enough to cater for gifted children?"

This question presupposes the idea that schools should be catering for gifted children. This notion is accepted without question by the participant. Instead of debating this issue the participants gave rationalisations of why schools either were or weren't. These points are illustrated by the speaker below. For ease of analysis the paragraph has been separated out into smaller chunks, allowing reference to individual lines.

PB:1 "...no I don't think generally that schools do enough
2 but I think they are doing more
3 because it's becoming politically correct to do so."

I: 4 "Okay,

- 5 *why do you think that they were not doing enough before?"*
- P: 6 "Because I think there are other things,
7 it was, it was either too hard,
8 or these children,
9 my belief is that these children generally fit in with just a bit of extra
work,
10 they're not a problem.
11 Whereas other children are
12 because if they're not learning they can turn into behavioural problems
13 and parents, I think, are generally more vocal about children who
aren't at the right level than the ones that are,
14 some parents are, but,
15 um, I just don't think it's recognised by schools."

The cohesive nature of this paragraph links schools' programming decisions with political correctness, vocal parents, difficulty of implementation and behaviour problems. The participant identifies all these factors as contingents in the provision of programmes for gifted children. Lines 1 and 15 identify the provision of gifted programmes as being a responsibility of schools. In these lines it is up to a school to recognise gifted education and to 'do enough' for gifted children. Lines 2 and 3 give the opinion ("I think") that the reason why schools may be taking on more of this responsibility is the increasing political correctness of doing so. However the answer to 'why they were not doing enough before' is not inpolitical-correctness, it is difficulty of implementation, the non-problematic nature of gifted children, non-recognition by schools, and less vocal parents. Presumably all these conditions can be put aside in the name of political correctness. It's a shame that children's needs don't stir the same movement.

Line 6 begins with the Conversation 'priorities' ('there are other things') then line 7 shows a change of thought and the speaker employs the 'difficulty of implementation' sub-Conversation of the 'restrictions' Conversation. The speaker moves on again to the definition of gifted as 'non-problematic'. In this case the non-problematic nature of gifted children is reasoning for a lack of specific programming for their needs. The 'opposition to special needs' Conversation is then employed to highlight the both non-problematic nature of gifted children as a rational reason for lack of programming, and as an explanation of the lack of 'vocal' parental advocacy for programming. Eventually the speaker sums up by saying non-recognition by schools is a main factor.

Lines 9 and 10 highlight the basis behind the non-problematic definition of gifted children

and its implication in the prioritisation of 'needs'. Line 9 explains Line 10: gifted children are not a problem because they 'generally *fit in* with just a bit of extra work'. The phrase 'fit in' carries a cultural model of a child who works to teacher expectation academically, socially and emotionally. It represents the objective of the education system's goal for its students: a set of pre-determined levels and desired behaviour, a set box for students to fit into. Once you fit you are 'not a problem'. Gifted students do not fit in, but simply require 'just a bit of extra work' in order to fit in.

These points are strengthened by the use of the Conversation 'opposition to special needs.' The problematic nature of special needs children is used to highlight the non-problematic nature of gifted children. Special needs children (according to line 12) turn into behavioural problems because they are not learning. When this is related back to the explanation of a non-problematic child one assumes that when a child 'fits in' it is an indication that they are learning.

Furthermore, now that the speaker has established that he is discussing the contrast between special needs and gifted, the listener can now come to understand, through line 13, that special needs children 'aren't at the right level' and gifted children are. In order for this sentence to make sense in the context of the paragraph the 'right' level in this instance is not the 'right' level in terms of the individual child's current abilities, it is the 'right' level in terms of school and parental expectations. The principal is again referring to the pre-determined standardised box that students are expected to fit into. The special needs children being discussed are not at the 'right' level in terms of the predetermined level that children of their age should be.

The principal explains that parents are 'more vocal' about students who aren't *at* this right level. The cohesive nature of the sentence and paragraph implies that it is only special needs children who aren't *at* the right level, and who are problematic and incur a higher degree of parental 'vocal'-ness. However, gifted children, by way of the definition already established, have already achieved this level: therefore they too are not *at* the right level. What the principal actually means is that students 'below' the level are cause for parental 'vocal'-ness, whereas those above are non-problematic. The listener needs to have a pre-established knowledge of the ideological belief in appropriate age-related levels, and the cultural importance placed on the hierarchy of these levels, in order to bring meaning to this

statement. In the end, however, whether the student is 'at' 'below' or 'above' the pre-set level is not the issue in terms of programming decisions. It is merely the impetus for parental 'vocal'-ness. It is the parental 'vocal'-ness that influences the programming decision. The statement is an example of the use of the Conversation 'outside pressure'.

The lessons to advocates of gifted education is clear. The reason schools currently don't 'do enough' is the non-problematic nature of gifted children, their ability to fit in and their parent's silence. Once gifted students acquire 'political correctness' they may be afforded with more recognition. Such a summary of events tells a story regarding the power of political and social influence over school policy makers. The Discourse presented above serves to fuel the ability of interest groups to exert power over decision makers. From this perspective, choice over curriculum delivery seems to be subject to the ability of interest groups to bring their particular needs and wishes to the foremost attention of school administrators. The group that is able to exert the most attention, whether it be through inappropriate behaviour, parental outcry or social/political trendiness is rewarded; the school will 'do more.'

This section has presented the Conversations of 'philosophy', 'restrictions' and 'outside pressure' to illustrate how these views impact the provision of gifted programmes. Principal's philosophical beliefs in terms of programming for gifted children are compromised because of 'restrictions' which limit ideal practice to actual practice. The existence of 'restrictions' means that the 'needs' of students must be prioritised. 'Restrictions' automatically imply prioritisation of 'needs' because of the importance of 'equity':

P: "Given that it's not a priority, you could probably argue that there isn't [enough support for gifted students]. I don't know. It's an equity issue isn't it, really?"

The next section looks at the role that the ideologies of 'equity' and 'equality' play in the provision of gifted education. Analysis of extracts looks at the use of the Conversations presented so far and discursive techniques employed by principals when discussing 'equity'.

Discourse in Action: The nature of equity in education

This section looks at the role that the ideologies of 'equity' and 'equality' play in the provision of gifted education. Analysis of extracts highlights the functions of Conversations identified so far. Extracts are also analysed in terms of discursive techniques employed by principals when discussing 'equity.' To allow analysis to include reference to small portions of text, the speech has been broken into lines each of which represents a separate thought within a sentence.

Danks, in her discourse analysis of attitudes towards mental disorders within the New Zealand community, identified what she called the 'rights repertoire,' a Conversation which was based on the notion of "lawful or fair entitlement to consideration, opportunities and treatment" which applies to all people (Danks, 1995:35). She noted that when this repertoire was applied to people with mental disorders "it was almost always preceded or followed by conditions," that is a disclaimer that gave criteria that needed to be satisfied before rights were granted. Within this discussion on gifted education most principals referred to the notion of equal 'rights' of student access to education. The type of education was qualified and the conditions of entitlement were defined.

"All children have a right to be educated"

- PA: 1 um, okay, um, my beliefs in terms of gifted education..(p)..
2 I think that, um, all children have a right to be educated,
3 a right to be educated according to their, their individual need,
4 So in that sense giving gifted and talented kids or gifted children the
same rights as anyone else.
5 Of course they go,
6 by and large,
7 go to regular schools
8 and as such need to fit into the organisation and the patterns of that
schooling.
9 Therefore what schools are required to do, I think,
10 is to look at the students,
11 identify special needs,
12 be they slow learners, behaviour needs, children that are deemed to be
gifted,
13 and they need to have those needs acknowledged, identified,
14 acknowledged and met
15 as far as possible
16 So in that sense they are like everybody else

17 in that they need to be understood and assisted with their learning.

The principal's main purpose of this statement originally appears to be a declaration of her personal commitment to the belief in the right of every child to an education suited to their individual need. This much is stated clearly and with certainty at the opening of the paragraph. The fact that such a statement needs to be made so pointedly is of interest to begin with. Nearly all principals made similar statements pointing out that 'all children had a right to be educated according to their individual need.' The fact that they needed to include such a statement in a discussion on gifted education could imply that it is a notion that the speaker does not assume the listener will take for granted; a notion that needs to be reinforced in discussion; a belief that could be open for debate. It also implies that the issue of equal 'rights' is an important one when discussing gifted education.

By referring to 'all children' as a whole, then to 'gifted children' as a sub-group the speaker has constructed 'the other.' Even though line 16 clearly states 'they are like everyone else' this statement seems to be a contradiction. By referring to gifted students as 'they' the speaker is distancing him/herself, and the listener, from 'them' and reinforcing the sub-group. The speaker could have said 'we are all the same'.

The discourse has given a collective group of gifted children a minority status. The function of this status is to allow the giving of conditions that must be met before 'they' can be awarded as the same status as us. While the principal makes clear the sub-group of 'the gifted' is something separate from the norm, line 4 informs us that 'in that sense' (the sense that they are children thus still part of 'all children') they are entitled to the same rights as 'anyone else'. These rights are, however, conditional, and the principal sets out the terms of these conditions: gifted children must 'fit in' and educational needs will be met 'as far as possible.'

The use of the phrase 'as far as possible' in line 15 is a reference to the Conversation of 'restrictions.' This is a disclaimer allowing the school a defence against criticism of provisions for gifted children. Lines 9 - 11 credits the school with the power of determining the 'needs' of a student. Lines 12 -14 declare the school's responsibility to 'acknowledge' and 'identify' those needs, but line 15 makes it clear that those needs will be met 'as far as possible.'

Line 8 sets the conditions of the agreement between community and school. 'Of course' gifted students, as part of a regular community, must 'fit into' the organisation of the school. The limited power of the child in these statements is of significance. The child is 'given' a right (with condition attached); the child's needs are identified *for* them, not *by* them. The children are 'assisted' and 'understood.' Everything that is done in this process is done *to* or *for* the child, not *by* them. This raises the issue of who is 'doing;' who holds the power? In this instance it is 'schools;' an inanimate object given a powerful position.

All children have a right to be educated, but that education is defined by 'schools' when 'schools' identify the child's 'need.' In addition, that right is only granted if a student conforms to expectation of 'schools.' While principals discussed the 'right' of a child to an education (that meets their 'needs') principals also talked about the notion of 'equity' which was spoken of as the basis for decision making. 'Equity' was discussed as a more complex idea involving a 'balance' of 'needs' and 'rights.'

"What is equity and what does it mean?"

- PA: 1 What we have to do,
2 we try to be equitable,
3 bearing in mind that we have to balance up need,
4 and what people should have with what they need.
5 What is equity and what does it mean,
6 and how does that translate into practice?
7 How do we balance up the right for each child to have an individualised
 programme to suit their particular need?
8 Yet we're organised into groups.
9 There are all those issues.
10 How do we allocate time?

In the phrase 'we have to balance up need, and what people should have with what they need' the principal seems to be pitting *rights* ('what people should have') against *needs*. Who and what defines needs and rights is not made explicit in this text. The two issues, 'needs' and 'rights', are expressed as opposing goals which a school must 'balance.' However, later in line 7, the speaker implies that each student's 'need' *is* their 'right', and the balance comes in trying to account for the individual 'particular' need of 'each' student in contrast to the differing needs of other students.

The speaker then goes on link the school's organisational structure and time restrictions as 'issues' that impinge on that 'balance'. In lines 5, 6 and 10 the principal uses rhetorical questioning to emphasise the dilemmic nature of 'equity', which is reinforced with the words 'try' in line 2 and 'bearing in mind' in line 3. The message of the paragraph is that 'equitable' education is an ideal blocked by the organisational barriers of the school system. These organisational barriers are not challenged. Perhaps 'we' are not meant to challenge, rather 'we' are meant to 'translate into practice.'

"Equity is an interesting concept, isn't it?"

PE: 1 Pushed into a corner
2 if you've got a finite resource
3 and you've got a bright child and a slow child in a school
4 most of the resource will probably go to the slow child
5 Rightly or wrongly
6 This is the person who needs extra help to keep up
7 The government drive of the moment is to close the gap
8 to help under-achieving children
9 It's not saying there are children at the top who could achieve more
10 Of course they could achieve more
11 I mean that's an endless argument
12 they could always achieve more
13 Equity is an interesting concept,
14 isn't it?

Potter and Wetherell (1992) discuss the use of rhetorical work when presenting a specific ideologically based report. They describe the speaker as being caught in a dilemma; how to present a potentially offensive, problematic or sensitive action, which could be reacted to as interested, biased or motivated. This extract can be read as an example of rhetoric used to deal with such a dilemma. The principal is attempting to illustrate the process of the subjective allocation of resources and funding as a natural consequence of equity-based education. What is essentially the principal's personal opinion and ideology is offered as a self-evident truth.

This rhetorical argument employs a number of Conversations and discursive resources that act to simultaneously offer a critique of the status-quo while giving a rationalisation that

avoids the speaker taking personal responsibility for the opinion. The two main Conversations employed are 'restrictions: limited resources' and 'priorities'. The limited availability of resources is expressly given as a root factor; line 2. This is then directly linked to the nature of the students in the school. Students are depicted as either 'bright' (stable internal competency view) or 'slow' children. These two groups are separated and polarised and their prioritisation in terms of need is built into their labels implicitly as previous analysis has shown. 'Bright' children are not as 'needy' as 'slow' children.

The qualifier in line 1 introduces the two Conversations. The principal has made a point of expressing the unavoidable and inevitable nature of the situation. With this in place, the principal is able to present line 4 as a simple description of reality, its importance backgrounded by the rationalisations used to introduce it. Line 5 serves to remove the comment from the realm of personal opinion, a necessary precursor to avoid audience analysis of line 6, which is the crucial ideological standpoint.

The phrase 'this is the person who needs extra help to keep up' is based on the ideological viewpoint of education as a means of ensuring children display socially determined standards. In this phrase school is not a place for achieving individualised goals, it is not a place of instilling a passion for learning for the sake of knowledge, it is not a place for allowing freedom of self-fulfilment. In this phrase school is a place where students are measured against expected outcomes and against each other. If you do not reach the outcome, 'help' is enforced upon you until you are in line with others ('keep up' presumably means 'achieve in line with peers').

The importance of this function of the school system is paramount. Ensuring all students meet the expected outcomes is so important that it takes priority when deciding funding issues. Once the outcomes have been achieved a student's educational 'need' is de-prioritised. This ideology is presented as a taken-for-granted description of educational reality.

The principal then continues his line of comment by adding a possible agent of causality and/or responsibility. An example of government policy is given (line 7), perhaps as a possible explanation for the situation. However, the principal does not commit him/herself to explicitly assigning accountability by avoiding the use of words such as 'because.' Neither,

though, does the principal negate such an inference as could have been done through the use of words such as 'incidentally' or 'nonetheless.' So the cohesive nature of this paragraph allows the principal, once again, to present her opinion of the cause of funding allocation as a description of reality; thereby, adding credibility and avoiding dispute.

Lines 8 to 12 are significant as they represent an obvious bias hidden in discourse. In line 8 a group of special needs children who could achieve more are identified as 'under-achievers,' a label that allows them to be targeted for 'help.' Lines 9 and 10 acknowledge the presence of gifted children who could achieve more, although not only neglects to afford them the label of under-achievers, but then lines 11 and 12 go on to discredit this group's significance by suggesting the futility of its plight. Thus although in a literal sense both gifted and special needs children are under-achievers, only in the case of special needs is this seen as cause for attention.

The speaker's final words perform their function admirably. The choice of words, its position in the paragraph and the discursive features enable the sentence to act as a summative finale - a disclaimer from personal opinion - and assimilates this version of reality with the common-sense of the wider audience. The position of the sentence aligns the previous statements regarding the 'need' for 'help' for special needs 'under-achievers', the requirement for all students to 'keep up' to a pre-determined set of learning outcomes and the futility of advocating for additional achievement of gifted students as all issues that come under the umbrella of 'equity.'

The final addition of the words 'isn't it' is not without significance. This is not an invitation to the listener to extend her opinion on the question of equity's interest value. It is a rhetorical finale which, within the context of the interview situation, allows the speaker to elicit the compliance of the audience without making any commitment as to the validity of her claims.

"Who needs what"

PA: 1 Well, it seems to me,
2 we either allocate our resources on an equal basis,
3 each individual is entitled to so much,
4 or we differentiate our allocation of resources according to need.
5 Now I don't think anyone would say that totally equal allocations is
equitable,
6 which is the key word.
7 So then what we do is we differentiate the allocation of resources.
8 As soon as you do that somebody gets more than somebody else,
9 the debate over who needs what will rage.

This principal remarks on the idea of a choice of resource allocation, a choice which he determines should be focused on the goal of equity. Through the process of reformation (Fairclough, 1989) the notion of 'equal allocations' in line 5 is pre-defined as 'each individual is entitled to so much' in line 2. Line 2's definition works with a 'rights' discourse of 'entitlement', 'equal allocations' talks about what one receives or is allocated, yet the two are spoken of as meaning one and the same thing, and neither is 'equitable'.

As in previous examples of equity discourse, the principal aligns his statements with the immediate and wider audience through the use of the word 'we' in lines 2, 4 and 7, and the phrase 'I don't think anybody would say'. This is an interesting phrase, useful for various functions. It is phrased negatively. It begins 'I don't think' pretending to acknowledge its status as an opinion but then continues in the vein of a descriptive statement. What the principal doesn't think is that anyone would disagree with the notion that 'totally equal allocations' is equitable. But then he tags the quick throwaway 'which is the key word' onto the end of this sentence. Now not only is the definition of 'equitable' assumed as agreed upon by all, but the fact that equity is the target goal of educators is also presented as matter-of-fact.

Line 7 gives the impression that the principal's choice between equal allocation and differentiated allocation is not much of a personal choice at all. Rather it is a *fait accompli*, naturally and unanimously accepted. Because equity is the key, the inclusive 'we' must differentiate the allocation of resources. Lines 8 and 9 then go on to present a number of pre-suppositions about the nature of reactions to the inevitable consequences of a focus on equity. Equity leads to 'somebody' getting more than 'somebody' else does. The inclusive 'we' has become less inclusive. Getting more is explicitly stated as an immediate consequence of

differentiation of resource allocation. Then the immediate consequence of somebody getting more is 'debate'. This assumes that 'somebody else' will have an issue with 'somebody' getting more (or vice versa - who raises this debate is unclear) which in turn assumes the parties will be informed of the amount each is to 'get'. It also assumes that the parties involved will express their issues through 'debate', which assumes they have access to the channels of 'debate' and are moved enough to undertake such 'debate'. So moved in fact that their debate will 'rage.'

Furthermore the principal explains exactly what will be the topic of the debate. The debate is over 'who needs what'. Through cohesion of the paragraph 'who needs what' becomes the crux of equitable decisions. The principal has nicely summed the argument of this chapter; that equity is a 'who' and 'needs' based decision. This analysis has also argued that the defining of 'who' and 'needs' is the basis for the principal's 'what'. The discourse of principals as examined in this research shows that when principals use the 'stable internal competency view' to define a 'who' as a group of 'the gifted' who, because of 'restrictions' exist in 'opposition to special needs' gifted children's 'need' becomes subject to low prioritisation. How principals' define 'what' appears to have little to do with individual children's educational goals, and more to do with 'outside pressure' and 'restrictions'. For gifted children 'what' is subject to the approval of 'we' who aim for equity.

Summary

The analysis of the Conversations that principals engage in when discussing programming for gifted students has identified the relationship between two main factors underlying practice; that is, principals philosophical beliefs and practical restrictions. Programming ideals are based on a principal's philosophical beliefs; however, actual practice is determined by the ability of the school to reach the ideals within certain 'restrictions.' Thus programming decisions ultimately become based upon available resources. Such resources include money, time and teacher ability. Because resources are said to be restricted and insufficient to meet ideals, choices have to be made regarding the allocation of resources. In order to systematically and efficiently choose resource allocation schools, principals and society categorise students into groups, then use the defining characteristics of these groups to assess their 'needs'.

'Needs' are then prioritised on a hierarchy, those with the highest need receiving more resources in the name of equity. Gifted children as a group are defined as non-problematic children likely to continue experiencing success. 'Needs' are defined in terms of a child's achievement of pre-determined norms and standards. Gifted children are labelled such because they have already achieved those standards, therefore their 'needs' receive lower priority. Reinforcing this de-prioritisation of the needs of gifted children is the Conversation that encourages a view of gifted as in 'opposition to special needs'. The 'needs' of special needs children are highlighted and expressed in acute form serving to further neutralise gifted issues.

Schools wary of criticism regarding their practice employ the conversations of 'outside pressure' and 'restrictions' to delegate responsibility and causality. Furthermore, principals engage in rhetoric driven discussions of equity and equality which serve to divert attention away from the outcomes of individual students, caused by programming decisions, by overshadowing analysis of practice with political and philosophical debate. These points are illustrated in the final extract.

"It would be morally wrong"

- I: 1 *So you mentioned resourcing, um,*
2 *are you happy with the way that CWSA children and programmes are*
 provided for by the government?
- PD: 3 Well they don't get particular resourcing
4 as do children who have special needs at the lower end of the scale.
5 But there is funding available,
6 limited as it is,
7 there is funding available.
8 So in terms of equity I don't think its equitable,
9 that we're not asked to identify the others.
10 I suppose the argument would be that the government has been quite,
11 um, quite cagey,
12 In terms of how they allocated the funding.
13 I suppose a school can determine how that's being used.
14 And I think some schools have used that for special abilities programmes.
15 You could argue a strong case for that.
16 There's an assumption that school like ***
17 'its easy'
18 'there's lots of money'
19 'we don't have the problems'

- 20 the reality is we do have a lot of children with special learning needs,
21 quite significant numbers,
22 and, um, there's not enough resourcing to cater for their needs and special
abilities ones as well,
23 And I suppose I feel it would be morally wrong to use it for children who
are currently coping well
24 That we know will survive in college
25 If we don't put some effort into the ones we know will fail significantly
26 If we don't give them a last chance before they leave the primary sector.

Although the interviewer has asked a closed question ('are you happy?') in reference to government provisions, the principal has answered with a debate on equity issues. In line 8 the principal states clearly that funding provisions are inequitable. However, the remainder of the speech functions to delegate responsibility for the inequities and rationalise the consequences of this delegation. The extract demonstrates a number of the identified Conversations in use.

The principal has employed the Conversations 'restrictions' and 'outside pressure'. Lines 6 states funds are limited and line 21 points out that the resources available are 'not enough' to cater for all student's needs. Lines 3 ('they don't get'), 5 ('available') and 9 (we're not asked') all serve to give the impression that the issue of resourcing is one that is imposed upon the school from outside. Who gives, makes available and asks is not stated but the implication is that it is the government. This is a reinforcement of the interviewer's original proposition that it is the government who 'provides'. However, line 12 acknowledges that it is the school's responsibility to determine the distribution of resources. Before making this acknowledgement the principal firstly states that he sees this situation as a result of the government delegating its own responsibilities (line 11).

The principal has also employed the Conversations 'on their own' and 'opposition to special needs to set up the 'stable internal competency view' in defining gifted students. Line 23 is an example of 'on their own'. The principal also makes the point of stressing the 'need' of special needs students in contrast to gifted. The combination of lines 18 and 19 cohesively feed the defining of special needs as 'problems'. The principal notes the gravity of these special needs 'problems' in line 21 ('quite significant'), line 25 ('significantly') and line 26 ('last chance'). Used in conjunction with 'opposition to special needs' this serves to diminish the importance of gifted educational needs.

The employment of these Conversations prepares the listener for acceptance of the crux of the argument, which is line 22. The principal is able to present the discriminative allocation of resources as an inevitability of moral virtue.

SECTION FOUR: Findings

Discussion of Findings:

The function of schools as a vehicle for social construction and reproduction of cultural norms has been discussed widely in educational literature. “We work within the tradition that considers education part of the process by which societies and cultures develop, revise, and renew their priorities, beliefs, values, policies, and institutions” (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995:1). Schools not only select and certify a workforce, they maintain privilege by taking the form of the dominant culture and defining ‘legitimate knowledge’ (Apple, in Corson, 1995): “in short...schools allocate people and legitimate knowledge, legitimate people and allocate knowledge” (Corson, 1995:9).

The medium for this allocation and legitimisation process is language: it is through discourse that power is exercised, established and perpetuated (Corson, 1995; Gavey, 1989). Hidden within language and discourse are ideologies and theories which serve the allocation and legitimisation of ‘the norm’. These messages can be subtle and illusive to those for whom they are already ingrained, and for whom the dominant discourse has become naturalised as truth. In this way ‘the dominated become accomplices in their own domination’: “In their language usage’s the non-dominant adhere to the linguistic norms created by dominant groups, while not recognising that they are being ‘voluntarily coerced’ (Corson, 1995:10).

The reproductive and creationist actions of schools are undertaken through discourses that are soaked in historical, cultural, political and, most importantly, veiled ideology: ‘veiled,’ that is, by linguistic tools which present ideological beliefs as fact. “It is easy to be seduced by a relativist moral stance wherein there are no markers by which one can measure the moral correctness of a position” (Thomas, 1998:8). Instead Thomas bade us hear the words of Durkheim (1933), who remind us of the subjective nature of our debate:

“Everything which is a source of solidarity is moral, everything which forces man to take account of other men is moral, everything which forces him to negotiate his conduct through something other than the stirring of his ego is moral” (Durkheim, 1933 in Thomas 1998:8).

The existence of dominant ideologies, morals and linguistic norms is not what is problematic: it is their unchallenged acceptance as 'common sense' and the consequences of this that is of concern in this research. Purpel and Shapiro (1995:1) point to the importance of not only recognising the relations between educational and social, cultural, moral, political and economic issues "but paradoxically to the significance of not acknowledging them."

"This perspective reminds us that educational issues cannot be adequately understood in merely technical and resource terms. They are fundamentally social questions, involving struggles over, for example, social justice, equity and citizenship" (Barton, 1999:54).

However, by engaging in the Conversation of 'restrictions' and 'priorities' principals, through their discourse, reduce their involvement in educational issues to 'merely technical and resource terms.' By upholding the theories of 'equity' in justifying their practice, principals accept the subjective notion of unequal differentiation of resources, and in turn accept without challenge the ideological definition of 'need' that decides this differentiation. By discussing 'the gifted' using the discourse of a 'stable internal competency view,' principal's sanction the creation of a group of stereotyped and over-generalised 'other' and what's more use this generalisation flexibly in order to justify discriminative practice which they then describe as 'catering for individual need'. It is vital to recognise the implications the acceptance of this discourse has for the educational progress of gifted students. "Members of society and even educators still hold beliefs and attitudes that result in actions that are often damaging to the optimal growth of bright children" (Clark, 1997:81).

The discourse of defining 'gifted':

Pollard (1996:309) claims differentiation, or any form of distinction between individual students is 'both necessary and inevitable' so that teachers may 'cope with the demands of classroom life.' He notes three main areas which teachers use to base differentiation: issues of control and discipline, interpersonal relationships and achievement. This has been reflected in the building of a definition of giftedness portrayed in this research. However, he also acknowledges that "serious responsibilities and potential problems are introduced when processes of distinguishing are applied by those with a degree of power and authority to the qualities and lives of other people" (Pollard, 1996:308-9). "The mere existence of supposed groups of this kind forces us to categorise, and the categories encourage a particular mindset

about a group, while in reality the 'groups' in question are 'cross-cutting, fluid and shifting'" (Young in Thomas et al, 1998:15).

Bayliss (1998) claims that the language of diagnosis becomes the basis for teachers to communicate professionally. They use 'diagnosis as communication' to transmit 'knowledge' about students in economical language. "In order to communicate the objectified knowledge and to legitimate the social group that created it, knowledge becomes reified, fragmented and rationally ordered" (Bayliss, 1998:68). Thus the holistic complexity of a child is reduced to a diagnostic label, e.g. 'gifted'. Problems arise when children are 'reconstructed' from the simplified label and 'procedures' of educational intervention are prescribed from this reconstruction. "The indexial construct [gifted] comes ready-made with a set of rules of procedure (derived from the word meanings associated with [gifted]) implicit within the construct (the programme to reconstitute the complexity) and it operates as a linear system: diagnosis, then prescription" (Bayliss, 1998:70).

This research has identified the construct of the word 'gifted' as it is used by principals for differentiation and prescription. The 'stable internal competency view' of gifted reflects a number of assumptions about human nature and learning common in the dominant discourses, which themselves reflect the dominant cultural and political ideology. The Conversation 'on their own' set within this view implies children's achievement is innate and unrelated to educational input. Such a view reflects a western focus on 'ability' as the pivotal attribute of performance, rather than 'effort' (which is said to be the focus of eastern cultures) or external influences, task difficulty or luck (which is said to be the focus of Polynesian cultures) (Biggs & Moore, 1993). Clark (1997) claims that this Conversation is the most influential on the perceptions of public and the actions of educators. Renzulli (in Cox, 1997:6) highlights the dangers of operating under such a construct: "we must constantly battle against that old assumption that gifted students can probably help themselves anyway – often they can't, and their talents are then wasted forever".

To be considered gifted, children must first display achievement within set guidelines and perform to behavioural standards. Children who did not reach standards set nor conform to behavioural expectations are simply not considered to be gifted; they have been incorrectly identified. Thus the concepts of 'gifted under-achievers', 'gifted with learning disabilities' and 'gifted children with emotional/behavioural problems' are negated. The definition given

by the discourse analysed in this case would make these notions a contradiction in terms. This explains the documentation citing the lack of provision for each of these groups by the New Zealand education system. Sturges (1998) claims that at the time of writing there was no national policy requiring schools to provide identification of or differentiated educational opportunities for GLD [gifted and learning disabled] children despite the recognition of these students in other countries. The Ministry of Education (2000) points out that some behavioural characteristics of gifted children so closely resemble those associated with ADHD that there is a danger of misdiagnosis. They also have concern over the large numbers of gifted underachievers: “the discrepancy between ability and achievement in many gifted and talented students is disturbingly large” (Ministry of Education, 2000:24).

The differing definitions of gifted imply differing prescriptions for educational intervention. When gifted children are defined as achieving children without social/emotional/behavioural issues, then programming decisions often neglect to address such areas. New Zealand’s history of gifted education shows an emphasis on academic growth (Ministry of Education, 2000). Gifted children are not seen as having emotional/behavioural or learning ‘needs’ and thus these things are not looked for nor attended to. Instead the ‘needs’ of a gifted child are looked at in terms of academic achievement; a better score, a first place, ‘more’ learning, ‘more’ knowledge. Such programmes fail to provide for gifted children whose emotional and social development is asynchronised with their peers. “As the levels of giftedness increase so does the need for appropriate support in emotional and social areas” and “emotional and social development of these children can become problematic if they find themselves out of step with their peers” (Ministry of Education, 2000:24)

The addition of the Conversation ‘on their own’ results in programming that is unlikely to include any emphasis on effort or dealing with outside barriers to achievement. Further, the label gifted not only suggests a course of action but a degree of priority that should be placed on the action taken and the resources allocated. This is achieved by the use of the words ‘need’ and ‘priority’ in association with gifted children and their concurrent use with reference to special needs children.

The discourse of defining ‘needs’ and ‘priorities’:

Once groups have been assembled through differentiation and diagnosis they are ranked in

accordance to their priority of need. "Such needs of a child are determined with respect to a reference group and implicitly reflect differential power relationships, construed as 'objective truth' (Bayliss, 1998:70). Purpel and Shapiro (1995) claim competitive judgements and ranking is an inescapable side effect of 'a pervasive legacy of logical positivist thinking in all areas of life' which has dire consequences when schooling becomes the victim. "To subject education so drastically to this process deeply disfigures and distorts classroom life and the process of teaching" (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995:49).

The 'distortion of classroom life' happens when the prioritisation and focus on 'needs' of a stereotyped group takes over from the provision of an open-ended holistic education. The 'needs' of children are often defined in terms of their achievement of school-determined criteria. A focus on achievement as defined through a battery of tests often means the generalised pre-determined criteria of these tests becomes the maximal outcome of educational programmes. Instead these criteria should be "only an indication of what was minimally expected or required...education should go beyond and do more than this" (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995:50).

Once knowledge has been legitimated, fragmented and ranked into a hierarchy it is easy to assess each individual child's 'knowledge' (that is a child's display of knowledge, what is measured and observed as a child's knowledge) against other children's 'knowledge'. This hierarchy serves to label each child's knowledge as either 'more' or 'less', and as such the differentiation in 'amount' of knowledge can be labelled on a scale of priority of need. With this in place limited resources can be allocated in accordance to ranked 'need'.

If a child's knowledge is labelled 'less' the child's need for assistance receives more priority than the child whose knowledge is labelled 'more.' Because the gifted child is (according to the definition portrayed in this research) one who possesses 'more' knowledge, their needs are considered to be 'extras' and do not take a high place on the hierarchy. A gifted child's educational programmes are not 'remedial'; they are 'extensions.' Such programmes are not necessary; they are bonuses.

Thorburn's (1994) 'charity view' of special needs students may well be patronising and oppressive, but it also serves to place them first in line when it comes to resource allocation. Because their learning needs are seen as actual 'needs' they are prioritised over gifted

children. Thus the 'stable internal competency view' of gifted children also acts oppressively by giving rationalisation to the diversion of resources to other 'more needy' students at the expense of the 'right to an individualised education'. "An emphasis on *needs* in special education detracts from a proper consideration of the *rights* of those who are being educated" (Thomas et al, 1998:9 italics in original).

The discourse of 'restrictions' and 'equity':

An unchallenged acceptance of school organisation results in principals taking a 'technical' view of policy and ideology rather than a critical stance. Principals often acknowledged the basis of their practice in terms of a commitment to the values of 'equity' but in doing so they neglected to adequately define, clarify or justify equity as a necessary component of educational planning, particularly in respect to educational outcomes for students. "Indeed, part of the calamity of the public discourse about education is that when we invoke the crucial moral and ideological commitments that inform education, we do so in ways that are filled with ambiguity, confusion, distortions, and silences" (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995:62)

When discussing theories and discourses in inclusive education Dyson (1999:42) identifies the 'pragmatic' discourse. This discourse favours a focus on what inclusive education looks like in practice over the critical reflection of inclusive theory. This leads to a focus on the organisational characteristics of inclusive schools and a discourse focused on practical recommendations in guides and handbooks. Such a focus backgrounds the ideological assumptions of 'inclusion,' leaving them unchallenged by principals who become 'practitioners.' "The realisation of inclusion is seen, not (or not simply) as something that has to be fought for, but as something that results from taking the 'right' sort of action at different levels of policy-making and implementation" (Dyson, 1999:43).

The principals' preoccupation with the 'restrictions' Conversation and their natural acceptance of 'a compromise in beliefs' meant that in terms of 'equity' principals showed examples of a pragmatic discourse in action:

P: "What is equity and what does it mean, and how does that translate into practice? How do we balance up the right for each child to have an individualised programme to suit its particular need? Yet we're organised into groups. There are all those issues. How do we allocate time?"

Although the principal begins by asking ‘what’ equity is, the remainder of the statement deals with ‘how’ equity is practised. How do we ‘balance?’ How do we ‘allocate?’ The focus is on how to achieve ‘equity’ within the ‘restrictions’ of the organisation. The fact the ‘equity’ will be practised is a given, and organisational ‘restrictions’ impinging on that practice are a given. Neither are challenged, instead technical ways of ‘balancing’ them are searched for. “Many educators define their major responsibilities as working with the hand that is dealt them: to respond to the particulars of the situation and to work with the students as they are, as the environment and setting is established, and within the concretised, mandated goals, objectives, expectations, requirements, roles, policies, guidelines and so forth” (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995:15). Educators need to clarify their construct of ‘equity’ and the basis of their acceptance of this concept. Although most principals in this study used ‘equity’ as justification of the prioritisation of special needs McAlpine (1992) reminds us that equity is a two-way street. “Equity is the cornerstone in arguing for appropriate and fair programmes for all groups of children – including CWSA. To overlook one group of children with special needs, e.g. CWSA, is seriously to disadvantage that group in overall educational provisions” (McAlpine, 1992:25).

While the Conversation of ‘restrictions’ as identified in this research echoes Purpel and Shapiro’s claim, one part of their statement is contradicted in the discourse of principals. Rather than working ‘with the students as they are’ one principal pointed out that students must also take on the ‘responsibility’ of working within the organisational setting of the school:

P: “...of course they go, by and large, go to regular schools, and as such need to fit into the organisation and the patterns of that schooling”

A focus on the organisational issues of ‘equity’ results in the uncritical acceptance of ‘equity’ as the right way to achieve social justice in education. Once ‘equity’ issues become the unexamined justification for practice, which is still ultimately determined by organisational structures, the consequences of such practice become secondary. “Within the deaf community, for example, Mason (1994) suggests that inclusive dialogue has stressed political, economic, bureaucratic, professional and administrative issues, rather than the effects of inclusive education on individual children” (Thomas et al, 1998:5). Within the transcripts analysed in this research, principals did not offer any examination between ‘equity’ based practice and educational outcomes. In his debate on ‘inclusive practice’ Dyson (1999:45) argues that educational programmes “that apparently deliver children’s

rights...may also, at the same time, provide those children with inferior educational experiences.”

Principals take on board the goal of ‘catering for individual needs’ given the ‘restrictions’ of the organisational structures of their schools. However, not only do they neglect to challenge the organisational structure, but they also forget the distorting affect that an acceptance of this structure will have on that goal. “The very goals society uses organisations to achieve are shaped by the nature of the organisations that are used to achieve them” (Skrtic, 1991:144). He cites Illich (1976) to describe this process: patients visit a hospital in search of ‘health’ but actually receive ‘medical care’, yet view the two as synonymous.

“Education is a social goal shaped by the medium of an organisation. Society wants education but what it gets is a particular kind of schooling, one shaped by the particular kind of organisation used as the mechanism to provide it. Although as such the organisational context of schooling should be an important topic of study for educators, historically they have neglected it” (Skrtic, 1991:144).

The discourse of delegation of responsibility

When principals did express support for a change to organisational structures, the responsibility for initiating this change was delegated outside the school through the Conversation of ‘outside pressure’. It becomes the responsibility of the state, or of the community: an interest group must rally itself in the name of change. However, the discourse also allows for barriers to restrain the actions of both these groups. Where the government dictates programming criteria it is ‘restrictive’ and ‘controlling’ in order to service its own agenda. Where the government leaves programming criteria open to school determination it is ‘divesting itself of responsibility’ or ‘passing the buck’, again in order to service its own agenda.

Parents are easily dismissed from the equation. Those that remain silent are by default supporters of the status quo. A lack of complaint is taken as an indication of satisfaction. However, those that do partake in debate are ‘pushy’, if too many join forces they become a ‘lobby group’, and once assigned this label they are may also fall into the ‘agenda’ category and, as with the state, are regarded with cynicism. Parents are spoken of as ill informed. The nominalisation of this ‘ill-informedness’ does not acknowledge responsibility nor causality of the ill information; it is omitted as if non-existent.

Purpel and Shapiro (1995:15) discuss the phenomenon of 'teacher bashing' as "yet another device to relegate educational issues to the technical realm, thereby allowing the larger culture to get off the moral and political hook." This analysis has highlighted the principals' redress: the Conversation 'outside pressure' which serves to both re-delegate responsibility back to society and state and simultaneously degrade the public voice by labelling it ill-informed or agenda-serving.

The existence of 'restrictions' to practice, the existence of 'lobby groups' and 'state agendas' and the importance of 'equity' is not what is of debate in this research. It is how these issues are portrayed in discourse and used to legitimate status-quo practice that is of concern. The 'rational' and 'real' aspects of these issues is in fact what makes the Conversations so useful in overshadowing the more pertinent issues, such as: what lies behind 'restrictions'; why do parents and state have agendas; and how do all of these issues affect individual student's educational outcomes? These are but a few of the questions raised: a small selection of issues that require further debate.

The limitations of our discourse are the limitations of our imaginations, and the limitations of our practice. We have forgotten that what once was theory, still is theory. Just because it has become practice does not make it truth, nor does it make it resolute. There are alternatives. A principal says, "yet we are organised into groups" and doing so accepts and convinces others that this is an axiom. This axiom is problematic; it disrupts the endeavour for 'individualised' programmes, yet the principal does not think to challenge it. Her discourse does not suggest challenge is an option.

Implications of the findings

The findings of the current study suggest a number of areas that educators should consider for reflection. First, the research advocates a greater awareness of discourse in use by educators. Second, the consequences of a narrow definition of giftedness identified by this research suggests educators seek a more holistic approach towards discussing students. Third, the discussion has suggested that principals take on board a more critical perspective on policy, rather than the technical approach which the discourse currently favours.

The importance of words can be clearly seen. Discourse determines ideology, which determines practice. Practice determines discourse, which determines ideology. Ideology determines discourse, which determines practice: chicken and egg style. Given the role that schools play in creating and reproducing dominant 'norms' in society the function that discourse plays in this role must be the subject of ongoing reflection. Dealing as it does with human lives, ongoing reflection of educational practice and discourse should be paramount. We forget that schools not only reflect society but also help to create and reproduce 'norms'. Once we have accepted this creationary role of schools then we need to accept the responsibility of ongoing reflection on 'the what' and 'the why' of what we are creating.

This study has reflected upon the construct of gifted children as it is demonstrated through the discourse of school principals. That construct was shown to be limiting in its nature; giving an image of gifted students as non-problematic and achievement orientated. Such a construct is bound to overlook the intellectual, affective, spiritual and physical complexities of individual learners. In her research on the mainstreaming debate in New Zealand Thorburn (1994) describes how people with disabilities tend to be defined in terms of their disability. "If you had a severe disability, the very first thing that others would most likely be told about you would be a summary of your deficits...there would be a file containing a lengthy description of your intellectual shortcomings, your physical impairments and your behaviour problems...nowhere would someone learn that you had a lovely smile, a strong sense of identity, and a family that cared about you (Meyer, Peck & Brown, in Thorburn, 1994:25).

The same can be said for the discourse on gifted students identified in this research. Gifted children are primarily defined in terms of their achievements in specific areas and

their differences from others. This leads to a narrow approach to identification and educational programming. Programmes for gifted children tend to be content based and designed to deal with what has been identified as a child's existing ability in a specific area. Defining students in terms of particular ability "works against useful, well rounded educational planning" (Thorburn, 1994:25). Moltzen (1995:295) points out that "one of the dangers in building a case for the special consideration of this group of students [gifted] is to over emphasis their homogeneity as a group." Instead educators need to approach students as individuals and plan an education for the whole child, rather than focusing on a small selection of generalised characteristics. This would suggest a "fluid definition of special need, whereby categories would be abolished and a child's needs would be defined as and when they arose" (Thomas et al, 1998:15). Moltzen (1995:296) maintains that the best learning environment for any student is based on a comprehensive knowledge of them as individuals."

A holistic view of individual students would require educators to challenge stereotypes and economical prescriptive-type approaches to educational programming. Such an approach would not come easy; it requires a challenge not only to principal's personal perspectives but also to social norms, expectations and organisational structures. However, as this research has shown, a challenge to organisational structures is not easily accommodated within the current discourse. 'Restrictions' are discussed as factors influencing programming decisions, but not as factors to be challenged by the schools. A discourse more open to change would extend further than the mainstream versus withdrawal debate and engage in discussion over the physical and organisational structures of our schooling system.

Similarly, rather than approaching 'equity' based policy from a critical perspective principals tend to focus on the implementation of the policy, accepting the principle of 'equity' as a given. The acceptance of this policy of 'equity', combined with the acceptance of 'restrictions' leads principals to make value-based educational decisions, yet principals do not recognise the moral base of their decision making process. Instead, the prioritisation of student's needs is presented as a *fait accompli*, driven by situational circumstance rather than personal morals. Educators need to partake in greater reflection on *how* 'needs' are defined and also more importantly, *who* defines needs. We need to ask ourselves what makes some needs 'special'; how do 'differences' become either 'deficits' or 'extras' (Bayliss, 1998). The greatest implication of this research is the suggestion that more questions need to be

asked.

Suggestions for further research

This research has reflected upon the role discourse has played in the determination and justification of educational programmes for gifted students. A discussion of the findings has highlighted but a few of the implications of hidden ideology in discourse. There are many more areas that the research suggests need further investigation. These include questions concerning the interaction of a social construct of gifted and children's self-identity and the interaction of a political climate of community input and the construct of parents as 'ill-informed' and 'pushy.'

"The process of intervention is not purely external to the object of the intervention (the child, or adult). How the child or adult themselves attribute 'deviance' or whether they even recognise that he or she is deviant will also affect the process" (Bayliss in Clark 1998:66). The words of Bayliss bade us remember the implications of our actions when we are dealing with the human psyche. The construct of giftedness not only affects a school's practice, but will also affect a child's self-image. How the child internalises that construct will have implications on how it sees itself as a learner and as a member of society.

The 'stable internal competency view' has many implications for a student's self-identity. The Conversation 'on their own' may cause a child to invest too high a regard in personal self-efficacy and locus of control, confusing situations involving failure. The Conversation 'non-problematic' may cause the child to be out-of-touch with its own emotional or behavioural responses. The Conversation 'achievement-orientated' may cause conflict between a child's wishes and outside expectations. To cope with this conflict children may compose a discourse of their own which in turn interacts with the school's discourse. Examination of such issues may uncover difficulties gifted children experience when their personal awareness is confined by a narrow societal construct. How does being labelled a 'gifted child' affect the self image of children when, as Borland (1997:7) claims, "the term gifted is as popular in the world of education as the term virus is in computer circles", or, as Moltzen (1999:58) states, "the word gifted itself is often used apologetically."

In light of the last decade of government policy, which has seen an increase in community involvement in school management, the Conversations 'outside pressure' and the construct of gifted parents call for further investigation. What is parents' response to this construct? Do they see schools as unapproachable and out-of-touch with their needs? How does a school's construct of parents affect children's self-image? What is the effect of the school's employment of the Conversation 'restrictions' on parents' self-efficacy? This is a small sample of questions, which the discussion of the principals' discourse suggests.

The Conversation 'opposition to special needs' was critical in highlighting the components of the definition of giftedness as employed by principals in this research. A reflective critique of the definition of giftedness then also requires a critique of the definition of special needs. If discourse on one group incorporates discourse on the other as part of its structure then the two groups become dependent on each other to define themselves. An example of this is the Conversation of gifted children as being in 'opposition to special needs.' Under this conversation the language used to describe one group automatically alters the listener's construct of the other group. Research into the repercussions of gifted discourse should include discussion on the repercussions of special needs discourse, as the two will work interdependently.

Limitations of the current study

The limitations of the current study, brought about by its structure and the confines of its objectives, have meant that many questions raised are best left to future research. A wider and broader study may have included investigation into political and social discourses impacting on principal's speech. A more detailed study may also have included extensive analysis of speech including transcription details of speed of delivery, intonation, timing and non-verbal features. "The absence of this detail limits the quality of the message that readers can take from the transcripts and obviously makes them imperfect replicas of their originals" (Corson, 1995:14).

Corson (1995) suggests that participants be re-interviewed after the analysis of their discourse to help confirm consistency of interpretations. This allows the researcher to consider the contextual factors and encourages the participants to reflect upon their use of

discourse. Within the structure of this study time was not allowed for follow-up interviews so the opportunity for such reflection was lost.

Validity

This study of discourse is not intended to present generalised findings of a large population. Rather, the intent is to provide specific examples, which a reader may then 'validate' through personal recognition of the arguments made and their perception of application and reliability. It is important to remember the distinction between the goal of traditional research, which may be to 'discover', 'reveal' or 'uncover' some fact or truth (Gavey, 1989) and the goal of discourse analysis which is to show how these 'truths' have been constructed and the consequence of this. Discourse analysts question the objectivity of empirical 'knowledge', and instead suggest that researcher interpretation is impossible to avoid. "Researcher findings don't have any meaning until they are interpreted, and these interpretations are not demanded by the findings themselves. They result from a process of negotiating meaning within the community" (Gergen, 1997:119).

This approach to analysis is arguably very different from empirical research techniques. It follows then that a validation of the analysis will also differ greatly. Potter and Wetherell (1987) identify four techniques that can be used to validate the findings of discourse analysis: coherence, participant's orientation, new problems, and fruitfulness. Coherence refers to the degree to which a researcher's analysis appears to be complete and trustworthy. Findings should not leave 'loose ends': i.e. there should not be features of the discourse evident in the data base that do not fit the explanation (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:170). While exceptions to patterns are expected they should be explained reasonably and accounted for in analysis.

When discussing participants' orientation Potter and Wetherell (1987) claim that in order for a researcher's finding to be valid the researcher must remain true to the intentions of the participant. "When looking at variability and consistency, it is not sufficient to say that as analysts we can see that these statements are consistent and these dissonant; the important thing is what [the participants] see as consistent and different. So although a turn of talk may, for example, take the standard syntactic form of a question, if the recipient treats it as

an accusation the analyst is also justified in interpreting it this way” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:170).

It has been noted previously that one of the goals of discourse analysis is the identification of the functions of discourse use. Potter and Wetherell (1987) claim that discourse use will not only solve functional problems, but will also create new problems during attitude construction. They argue that this feature of conversation, if recognised in analysis, helps determine the validity of the findings. “The existence of new problems, and solutions, provides further confirmation the linguistic resources are being used as hypothesised” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:171).

Finally, the findings of discourse analysis can be assessed in terms of their ‘fruitfulness’, or their ability to ‘make sense of new kinds of discourse and to generate novel explanations’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:171). Research that opens the topic up for further analysis or critique is regarded with respect. Potter and Wetherell (1987) state that this list of validation techniques is not designed to be either indisputable or fail-safe. “Infallible criteria exist only in the land of positivist mythology: there are no crucial experiments, knock down refutations or definitive replications in the real world of science” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:172).

This report has followed the above recommendation in regards to validity issues. Where participants offered contradictions, or differing participants held differing views, the report gives an account of this and offers some explanation. The analyst has considered participant’s orientation and remained true to the context of the speech. The report also highlights the problematic nature of the discourse given and offers a variety of areas for further analysis. Above all, the report exhibits participant’s language in verbatim form and presents the analysis in logical sequence so that the reader may decide upon the ‘validity’ of the findings for themselves.

As mentioned above, it is important to remember the goal of this study as it differs from that of traditional research. It is not intended that generalised statements are taken from these findings, rather the study serves to provide a structure for reflection upon current thought and practice and open the doors to future research. The incapacity to make generalisations is not seen as a limitation of this research, rather it is considered to be a strength. The overuse and

acceptance of generalisations made from empirical research should be a source of concern to the reflective educator.

Conclusion

The pessimistic view of the future of gifted education initiatives is perhaps a recognition of the ideology that works in discourse to undermine the recognition of gifted issues. A focus on the practicalities of organisational restrictions and a prioritisation of the needs of special needs students has resulted in the discriminative allocation of resources in the name of equity. Gifted students and their supporters should not have to advocate for equal recognition of their needs on their own in a system which holds debate within a narrow construct. Rather the needs of the gifted should be catered for automatically by an education system which recognises the holistic complexities of all students, and works reflectively to continually challenge barriers to this goal. Opening discourse to the possibilities of a holistic individualised approach to education is the beginning. Schools need also to recognise the role their discourse plays, not only in producing and recreating this discriminative practice, but also in restricting avenues for change. Principals need to open their discourse to allow the state, the community and the students to hold some power within discussions. Rather than delegating responsibility and constructing discourse to rationalise unsatisfactory status-quo, all must work together to achieve their ideals.

Appendix A: Transcript Symbols

The following transcript symbols have been used in this report:

- I:** indicates the passage has been spoken by the interviewer
- P:** indicates the passage has been spoken by the participant
- []** used to give context of a passage of speech
- ...** a short pause between words
- (p)** a discernable interval, or longer pause, in dialogue
- .** a full stop indicates a fall in intonation, reflecting a linguistic rather than a grammatical end of a sentence.
- ,** a comma indicates a continuing intonation within a sentence, again used linguistically rather than grammatically.
- ?** a question mark indicates rising intonation, and may or may not mark a question.
- !** an exclamation mark indicates an animated tone.
- {laugh}** indicates laughter within the dialogue
- ***** indicates a word has been omitted from the transcript in order to protect anonymity of the participant.

Reference: Danks (1995)

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

Briefing:

You've read the information sheet and seen that the focus of this interview is the topic of gifted education in New Zealand, and the discourse used when principals discuss this topic.

You are aware I **am** going to be **recording** the interview for verbatim transcription, but I'll just check again that this is okay with you before I **tm** the tape recorder on.

Before we start do you have **any questions** about the research or this interview?

I have set themes and questions to guide the interview, but I may deviate from these if something you say leads into an interesting discussion.

TURN ON TAPE - check after 30 mins

Themes:

A: Ways principals **describe** g.ed

B: Ways principal **justify** their practice

1. Tell me about some of the **experiences** (if any) you have had working with gifted children.
2. How does **your school cater** for CWSA children?
3. What were the **reasons** behind your decision to cater for these children in this particular way?
4. **Are you happy** with the way CWSA children and programmes are provided for by the NZ **government?** (in terms of **funding, curriculum, etc**).
5. Why/Why not?
*. Why do you think the government chooses to cater for CWSA children in this way?
Do you think these are legitimate reasons?*
6. Do you feel your **school and teachers** of CWSA children receive **sufficient support** from outside agencies when catering for CWSA children? (**resources, training, public support**)
7. Why do you think this is? Why/What makes this support sufficient/insufficient?
8. Do you feel the **CWSA children** in your school are catered for sufficiently, not only by your school, but also by outside agencies and the community? (i.e. in **terms of both their intellectual and emotional development**)
9. **Why** do you think this is? Why/What makes this support sufficient/insufficient?
10. What **changes**, if any, would you like to see in the New Zealand education system in terms of gifted education?
11. Why do you think these changes are necessary? / Why do you think change is unnecessary?

Debriefing:

Recap main points for clarification

These are all the questions I have, is there **anything else** you would like to add on this topic?

TURN OFF TAPE

Thank you for your **time**, now the interview will go on to be transcribed and analysed. Your name will not be mentioned, but some of the things you have said may be quoted verbatim. During the analysis I am looking not only at what you have said, but why you said - what functions the discourse serves.

Do you have any **further questions** at this stage?

Please feel free to **contact me** at any time if you have something further you would like to discuss.

Appendix C: Consent Form

*Principals Discuss Gifted Education A Thesis in Discourse Analysis
undertaken by Justine Rutherford*

Consent Form

*I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.
My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I
may ask further question at any time.*

*I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to
answer any particular questions.*

*I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will
not be used without my permission. The information will be used only for this
research and publications arising from this research project.*

I agree / do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

*I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any
time during the interview.*

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed

Name

Date

Appendix D: Information Sheet

*Principals Discuss Gifted Education A Thesis in Discourse Analysis undertaken by
Justine Rutherford*

Information Sheet

page 1 of 2

Please ensure you have read this sheet fully before signing the consent form

Purpose and Rationale of the Research

In his account of gifted education in New Zealand Moltzen (1996) 'a new era' which 'may hold more promise than many previous periods' - however he is not fully optimistic: "there is ... no real reason to believe that any improvements will be more enduring than the short-lived gains of the past." (Moltzen, 1996: 1) 'Is this pessimism due to the fact that the view and attitudes of educationalists, as seen through their language, has changed little in the last century? A study of attitudes is important if one is interested in examining current practice in gifted education.

Objectives

Through the research design of discourse analysis it is intended that this study will examine the discourses used by school principals when justifying and describing current practice in gifted education in New Zealand primary schools. These discourses will be examined to assess their ideological nature and assumptions. The use of the identified discourses will then be looked at in terms of the implications on both current practice and future initiatives in gifted education. The specific research objectives are:

- Investigate the ways principals describe and justify the treatment of gifted education in New Zealand*
- Explore the implications of these positions and the ways they are justified in the context of wider beliefs about the nature of equity and equality in education*
- Explore how these beliefs perpetuate continuing inequalities in gifted education.*

Research Questions

- What are the common discourses employed by primary principals when discussing gifted education?*
- What reasons do principals give for the nature and extent of gifted education programmes currently practised at their schools?*
- What functions do the identified discourses serve?*
- How does the use of such discourses impact on practice in education?*

' Moltzen, R. (1 996) Historical Perspectives. In Moltzen, R. & McAlpine, D. (1 996) Gifted and Talented.. New Zealand Perspectives. Palmerston North: ERDC Press

The Researcher

I am Justine Rutherford, a student at Massey University, and this research is intended for the purpose of completing a thesis report as part of a Master of Education (Special Education). My contact details are: Justine Rutherford Ph: 443 1198

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The supervisor for this project is:

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The Participants and their role within the research

For the purpose of this study a sample of five Auckland primary school principals have been selected randomly using a systematic sampling procedure where every nth name was selected from a list of all Auckland primary schools. Upon informed consent principals will be asked to participate in a private interview with the researcher. It is envisioned that each interview will take approximately one hour and will be held in the participant's place of business. All interviews will be recorded on audio cassette and then passed to an independent person to be transcribed. Interviews will be transcribed fully as it is the exact structure of the language that is of interest.

Ethical Concerns

Massey University Ethics Committee approval has been sought for this research.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

- Participants will be contacted by telephone or mail by the researcher only and for the purposes mentioned above only. Names and contact details of participants will not be given out to any other person by the researcher.*
- A confidentiality agreement will be obtained from the person employed to transcribe the tapes beforehand. All audio cassettes and their transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researchers private home. Names and identifying symbols will be deleted or obscured from all documents for the sake of confidentiality. Participants will be identified using a code known only to the researcher.*
- The final presentation of this research will involve not only a report of the findings but also actual examples of the data collected (ie: samples of the text). Confidentiality and anonymity of subjects becomes a practical difficulty when the researcher is presenting verbatim interview data for the purpose of discourse analysis. Even though names will not be used individuals are sometimes identifiable by the originality of their quotes or any peculiar speech patterns. Although other research methods would encourage generalisations or the deletion of identifying characteristics of responses when presenting data (eg. "most people agreed") discourse analysis relies on the specifics of language for its analysis and therefore data must be presented in its origin form. Participants need to consider the potential consequences of such a presentation of data before they agree to participate in the research.*

The Rights of Participants

All participants have

- The right to decline to participate;*
- The right to refuse to answer any particular questions;*
- The right to withdraw from the study at any time before publication;*
- The right to ask any questions about the study at any time during publication;*
- The right to provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;*
- The right to be given access to a summary of the findings of the study when it is concluded.*

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