

The gifted: Identity construction through the practice of gifted education

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Over the past two decades in Australia, the field of gifted education has expanded considerably. The term 'giftedness' has effectively entered mainstream discourse. The field of gifted education, which nowadays operates as a compensatory function of mass education, is comprised of groups of people who broadly share in the concept of giftedness but contest, through discourse, its meanings and practices. This paper explores the politics of 'identity construction' through gifted practice. Social constructionism was used in the study theoretically and methodologically, to underpin discourse analysis and the life history approach to research. This paper aims to delineate the study generally, and to shed light on its findings. It explores history, arguing that gifted education, despite prevailing claims to inclusivity, sustains competition and individualism and subverts the social function of education.

Giftedness, social constructionism, life history, discourse analysis, identity

INTRODUCTION

South Australia's first policy on gifted education was passed in 1979: *The Education of Intellectually Gifted Children* (South Australia Education Department, 1979). Despite a conspicuous title, which cast the gifted child as a discrete category, the policy objective was relatively mild in comparison with its successors. It stated simply that gifted children were "students with individual differences that needed to be catered for within existing schools by regular teachers" (Braggett, 1985, p.113). Around that time no significant programs had been created for gifted children within schools and little had occurred to define, coordinate or disseminate gifted education practices (Vialle and Geake, 2002). According to some writers, the egalitarian socio-political ethos of the 1970s and 1980s had initially provided an unreceptive context for gifted education in Australia (Krisjansen and Lapins, 2001; Ryan, 1994). This was reflected in the South Australian Education Department's early social democratic views on gifted education, which affirmed that "it is inappropriate to refer to a discrete, unvarying category or group called 'the gifted' since such a presumption would lead to applications that were both 'rigid and divisive'" (South Australia Education Department, 1987, pp.7-8).

Since then, however, gifted education has grown into a prominent educational movement with special programs, competitions, organisations, schools, as well as accelerated pathways through education being established to provide for the unique needs of gifted children. It is popularly understood as a strategy that caters for individuals, is believed to solve problems related to student underachievement and disengagement, and is regarded as a necessary intervention for certain children 'at risk' of behavioural and emotional disorder (Rimm, 2003; Silverman, 1997).

The Significance of Critical Investigation

In South Australia the most recent inquiry into The Education of Gifted Children (Senate Inquiry, October 2001), has produced 20 recommendations that collectively bid to strengthen the State's growing gifted network in a number of strategic ways. These include the development of a consistent policy that encourages suitable acceleration for the gifted; ability grouping options as a means of meeting the needs of the gifted; more flexible university entry and study options for the gifted; and the requirement, as a condition of employment, that newly graduated teachers have at least a semester unit on the special needs of gifted children in their degrees (Senate Enquiry, October 2001).

Pending the abovementioned recommendations, which affect all levels of education in South Australia, this paper engages a critical modality: the possibility of questioning gifted education in the here and now. Why has support for gifted education recently burgeoned; to what extent does gifted education, as a compensatory function of mainstream education, either challenge or support hegemonic power relations; how might gifted education preclude other, possibly marginalised ways of acting in the world; furthermore, when adhering to gifted terminology and practice, what are the belief systems to which we are, by *de facto*, adhering? In short, what are the social justice implications of the gifted category for all children?

The South Australian Education Department's views on gifted education have shifted dramatically since the 1980s. Nevertheless, several writers raise the viewpoint that gifted education in Australia and abroad offers a narrow and fundamentally inequitable form of education (Carey, 1994; Krisjansen and Lapins, 2001; Margolin, 1994; Oakes et al., 1997; Poynting and Noble, 1996; Ryan, 1994; Sapon-Shevin, 1994; Staiger, 2004).

By mapping the cultural power relations that have produced the movement over the past century, I seek to conceptualise the field by illuminating and questioning gifted education's commonsense beliefs. Using social constructionism as a lens, I contend that 'commonsense' frequently works in favour of society's relatively powerful groups. Thus the aim of this paper is to open out a space within which South Australia's contemporary government of gifted children may be viewed critically. The ensuing section explains the study in general, followed by a historical exploration from which conclusions are brought to light.

THE STUDY

The study aimed to draw informed conclusions about gifted education's orientation to social justice by conceptualising its prevailing discourse politically. In order to develop a robust image, the field was conceptualised in two ways: a historical look at gifted education since the turn of the century through an exploration of policy and literature, and the analysis of life history interviews with three gifted education practitioners. During the latter, each participant was viewed as a political being whose subject position in society offered a discrete window onto the field at large.

Educational movements can similarly be viewed politically by assessing their prevailing beliefs. These are practised through curriculum and student management, and allow students to take up certain subject positions and not others. Thus, the identities formed by educational movements are equally political and ultimately impinge upon the construction of society at large. By asking the central question of how the field of gifted education constructs the gifted student, the study simultaneously asks: how does the field operate; what are its beliefs; what manner of society does it seek to construct; and, therefore, what are its far reaching implications?

The study itself was located within a political framework aligned with the theoretical assumptions of social constructionism: the promotion of a critical approach; a critical stance against taken-for-granted knowledge such as hegemonic or essentialist claims to truth; acknowledgement of the

cultural and historic contingency of knowledge; as well as the political implications that connect knowledge and practice, and the social contexts that connect education to the wider world. It was a reflection of social constructionism that my location as a researcher should be acknowledged. Part reason for this was to suggest that all research endeavours and all beliefs are positioned. Thus the aim of the study was presented as a search, not for truth, “but for any usefulness that the researcher’s ‘reading’ of a phenomenon might have in bringing about change for those who need it” (Burr, 1995, p.162). The study’s conclusions, therefore, were not seen to be exempt from the so-called ‘critical stance’ they brought to bear on the field of gifted education, but were acknowledged as social constructions themselves. The conclusions raised in this paper are likewise presented to stimulate discussion, to give voice to marginalised groups and to draw from the critical perspective useful information for future policy and practice.

Curricular Justice

In order to conceptualise the idea of ‘education and social justice’ in this article, I succinctly outline three political orientations to situate more explicitly the study and field under analysis: Connell’s ‘curricular justice’, the ‘liberal perspective’, and the ‘new economism’. These perspectives are delineated so that informed conclusions can be made whilst allowing for a scope of viewpoints.

Connell (1993) explains that curriculum is hegemonic when it marginalises other ways of organising knowledge, is integrated with the structure of power in educational institutions, and occupies the high cultural ground, defining most people’s commonsense views of what learning ought to be. From these observations he develops a standpoint that asks that schools consider the interests of the ‘least advantaged’. This means acknowledging social contexts – such as class and race – and recognising that a focus on the individual alone precludes the opportunity to address existing social inequalities. The standpoint of the least advantaged also means developing curricula and accepting that knowledge can be organised in ways other than the mainstream hegemonic curriculum.

Connell therefore advocated a fundamental reconstruction of the mainstream curriculum and rejected separate-and-different compensatory education schemes. He argued that compensatory schemes focused predominantly on individual needs but in so doing ‘they leave the currently hegemonic curriculum in place’ (Connell, 1993, p.44). Connell advocated greater student participation as a mechanism for achieving an education experience based upon ‘common schooling’. This notion argued that in order to facilitate broad community involvement in social life, and to enhance the process of democracy, students needed to be actively involved in the school community. He argued:

To be active participants in such decision-making requires a range of knowledge and skills (including the skill of getting more knowledge). This range is required for *all* citizens ... You cannot have a democracy in which some ‘citizens’ only receive decisions made by others ... this criterion rules out selection, competitive assessment, streaming and classifying mechanisms in schooling while the common curriculum is in operation, since such mechanisms differentiate offerings and therefore advantage some citizens over others. (Connell, 1993, p.46)

Connell also advocated that students and educators should become aware of the historical production of (in)equality. This meant developing awareness of the processes in which we participated to reproduce social relationships. In terms of power relations, Connell’s framework suggested that the privileged step out from the mainstream to meet with so-called ‘difference’ on the terms of the marginalised; he advocated a destabilisation of hegemony in order to equalise social power relations to work toward greater equality of access to power.

Owing to Connell's acknowledgment of history, the attention he paid to social power relations, and the scope his proposed framework allowed for broad contextual thinking, 'curricular justice' most closely articulated with the study's social constructionist standpoint.

Liberal Perspective

The liberal perspective contends that education reduces social inequality by developing the capacities of the individual. Liberal educational policies have in the past produced child-centred curricula and compensatory education schemes. Compensatory schemes are those that are added to the existing mainstream curriculum to cater for the needs of disadvantaged groups.

Kemmis et al.(1998) affirm that the liberal view seeks:

To develop a sense of the good, true and beautiful in every child ... It takes an individualistic perspective on social philosophy, and sees the development of autonomous persons as the aim of education ... It is 'liberal' in the sense that it sees education as the liberation of persons by reason, both individually (through development of reasoning) and socially (through democratic processes of reasoned debate). (Kemmis et al., 1998, pp.140-141)

In terms of social power relations, the liberal perspective typically invites the 'marginalised' to be compensated within the realms of the mainstream, on the terms of the privileged, and without destabilising society's hegemonic centre. Thus, education in liberal democratic societies, such as mainstream Australia, is about the development of the individual (McWilliam, 1999). The belief in Western liberal democratic societies is that children are, by nature, incomplete; that they will reach adult fruition and become autonomous, fully functioning citizens if, through a universal path of development, their unique needs are met (McWilliam, 1999). Gifted education is strongly directed toward the developmental needs of the individual. The remaking of Gifted Education and individualism has coincided over the past decade or so.

The New Economism

The so-called 'new economism' in education was of concern in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s. A number of political changes to education were made at a time that was seen to "return [education] to a concern with standards and an emphasis on training future members for the workforce" (Haralambos et al., 1996, p.272). The policies that issued from that period were predicated on government sentiments that blamed the education system for rising unemployment and failing to produce "appropriately skilled and motivated young workers".

According to Hattam (1999), one of the school cultures that accompanied the new economism was what he called a "stuck culture". A "stuck school culture" is not likely to celebrate difference; teaching from this perspective is either individualistic or balkanised; the stuck school is likely to hold a deficit view of students; and will allow its teaching agendas to be driven from outside by accepting the social conditions which have accompanied the marketisation of schooling (Hattam, 1999). These conditions have resulted in:

The muting of social justice discourse ... neoliberal governments retreat to a 'blaming the victim' position by marshalling such arguments as the need for freedom of speech. The empirical evidence however, overwhelmingly supports the view that the outcomes of schooling are still very much skewed in favour of those who are already advantaged in society. The already disadvantaged or disenfranchised continue not to be served well by the schooling system and the present confluence of reforms is only making things worse. (Hattam, 1999, p.251)

The scope presented by these three positions on education and social justice was used in the study to conceptualise gifted education both politically and historically.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

In order to invite life history participants, information sheets which outlined the study and the requirements for participation were posted through the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), as well as the Gifted and Talented Children's Association of South Australia (GTCASA). Three volunteers responded: two from the independent, and one from the public schooling sector. There are a small number of elite schools in Adelaide that employ in-house coordinators to direct pull-out programs for gifted children. The first two participants occupied these roles. The third participant had taught at a number of state schools. Her involvement, contrary to the other participants, was brought about less intentionally and more compliantly by way of the state's 'Students of High Intellectual Potential' (SHIP¹) program.

The latter proved enlightening in terms of conceptualising the rise of gifted education in South Australia in recent years. It has been argued by critics of the gifted movement in Australia that the SHIP initiative – which was initiated around the same time as other gifted education schemes nationwide – signified a radical swing away from the nation's more social democratic provisions; that it stood to deny “the well documented socio-cultural determinants of intellectual development” (Ryan, 1994, p.11); and finally, that SHIP was a direct example of non-democratic decision-making, for it was decided amid non-consensual negotiations (Ryan, 1994). These contentions were taken into consideration when contextualising the third participant's life history data against the study's historical backdrop.

Given the voluntary nature of recruitment, the participants' so-called 'subject positions' were unplanned and thus the study's findings flowed uniquely from the life history transcripts, literature and policy documents combined. Owing to the combination of both public and independent school participation, ethics approval to run interviews was required from several sources: the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee, DECS, all three participants, and their school principals. The actual research was conducted on three separate occasions, with participants giving, on average, three hours of their time. The life stories were recorded and later transcribed. In the latter part of each interview, participants were invited to talk specifically about their approach to gifted education. Discourse analysis was then used to consider all collected data.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is neither a straightforward nor easily defined undertaking; different researchers develop different methods. The method that was used in the study reflected a range of

¹ SHIP: Students with High Intellectual Potential was, and still is, a secondary school program which was launched in South Australia in 1993; the SHIP Task Force had been developed two years earlier. The scheme was implemented in response to lobbying by parents and teachers who believed gifted children were disenfranchised by the education system. SHIP was established within three focus schools and designed to train and develop teachers in the identification and management of gifted students. The aims of the program were to ensconce gifted teaching practices into the mainstream schooling system, to establish giftedness and the 'needs' of gifted children as common to the broader community, and to increase eventually the use and acceptance of gifted education beliefs and strategies across the State. (Skabe, 1996: online).

documented approaches², which were blended to consider how the field constructs the gifted student? How the field operates? Each life history was approached with the same general question in mind: how did this person come to be a ‘gifted teacher’, and what could the overarching story of their life reveal about gifted education today?

After transcribing the taped interview (on the whole, verbatim), the complete story was read through and the data were rewritten into a coherent, chronological whole, in order to develop an awareness of the history as a narrative account (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995, p.15). As a developmental account, the major epochs that defined the person’s life were marked out and conceptualised according to prevailing discourses. “The subject positions [that were] offered by different discourses, and the identity and political implications of these” (Burr, 1995, p.166), were thus reflected upon.

When considering the identities either taken up or rejected throughout the narrative, participants were viewed as social agents exercising the power available to them. In order to define them as political beings and to determine their available power, the participants’ contexts were considered, for people are understood in relation to others as well as in relation to their environment. Thus, the subject as an emergent political being was continually considered in light of her present subject position within the field of gifted education. Once located in her overall life story, the participant was then located as a more or less powerful subject position within the socio-historic framework of gifted education.

The intersection between theory and method

Social constructionism offers a distinct theoretical and methodological base for research – a means of interrogating social practices to unearth the ways in which power works unevenly as a capillary force throughout society, frequently with the result that some groups are marginalised more than others. Power, in this framework, can be thought of in close relation to wealth and class and to the ability that various social identities have in exercising control over their own lives and the lives of others. Meadmore (1999) writes:

Powerful people ... inform and influence discourses. Because we are produced by such discourses, say for example, those of social class, gender or ethnicity, some people have more input at the level of ideas than others. (Meadmore, 1999, p.58)

In this way, the subject positions of each life history participant – their variant statuses within the field of gifted education – were considered in terms of their input at the powerful level of ideas. In terms of taking a critical stance toward, for example, essentialist claims to truth, social constructionism allowed the study to look beyond gifted education’s core beliefs – such as the reification of intelligence, or the stance that giftedness is a psychological reality (Silverman, 1994). Instead, these commonsense truths were questioned for their historical origins as well as their contemporary articulations with power structures beyond the field of education.

² Brown’s ‘Identity claims analysis: a strategy for the interpretation of life history accounts’ (1994); Burr’s ‘An introduction to social constructionism’ (1995); Rosenwald and Ochberg’s ‘Storied lives: the cultural politics of self-understanding’ (1992); and Hatch and Wisniewski’s ‘Life history and narrative’ (1995), were consulted when developing a discourse analysis format.

The theoretical assumptions which were mentioned above³ thus bear out social constructionism as a research methodology for they portend critical practice: the practice, for example, of considering the cultural and historical specificity of knowledge.

HISTORY

Mass compulsory education, though it was predicated in part on sentiment and in accordance with a belief in equality of opportunity for all children to access education, was in many ways neither equal to nor beneficial for all (Germov, 1998; Hatton and Elliot, 1998; Heitmeyer, 2001; Kyle, 1999; Woods, 1998). Modelled on an upper-class British template that favoured some and not others, from the outset Education has always been implicated in the reproduction of an uneven class system (Lovat, 2001; Meadmore, 1999).

The IQ test, first invented by Frenchman Alfred Binet, was translated into English by American psychologist Howard Terman in 1916 (Margolin, 1994). Before then, the impetus to measure had already emerged, represented by various mental capacity tests, with the first tests of mental capacity, or intelligence, being measured according to head size and body type (Oakes et al., 1997). Psychologists in Western society readily accepted the IQ test as a more valid and reliable way of measuring intelligence, and explored its applications. Early industrialised society was motivated by an impetus to measure and grade human capacities (Margolin, 1994), to become more competitive, more efficient in the global marketplace. In this way, the impetus to measure eventually led to IQ testing in schools, which both drove and adhered to the pervasive commonsense belief that intelligence was innate and fixed, an understanding that was decontextualised “from the unequal conditions of society” (Oakes et al., 1997).

The unfair social contexts that had largely been overlooked up until the middle of the twentieth century were eventually recognised owing to the rise of several social movements in Western civilisation (Oakes et al., 1997; Lovat, 2001). As a result, Terman’s IQ research was criticised for racial bias and for maintaining unjust social arrangements. During the 1980s, education increasingly became seen as a solution to poverty, and more interest was directed toward society’s marginalised groups. It was around this time that the notion of giftedness, intelligence and ability were re-engineered, and thus terminology such as ‘disadvantaged’, ‘context sensitivity’ and ‘inclusiveness’ were injected into gifted literature and policy, and the gifted movement re-emerged.

Though significantly simplified here, the study’s historical exploration of literature and policy unearthed a wealth of contextual information, later raised in conclusion.

Life History

Throughout each of the life histories, the prevailing discourses which shaped the participants’ political location and discrete understandings of the world were mapped. These so-called ‘identity maps’ eventually provided a picture, an understanding as to why and how each participant chose to become a gifted practitioner. The life histories also enlightened the political character of the field that was represented by each participant.

My first interviewee, was raised as a privileged, Anglo-Australian member of society amid a multicultural setting. Aspects of her childhood and passage through life accounted for her contemporary position as a gifted professional, and the scope of that perspective. Her elite and

³ The promotion of a critical approach; a critical stance against taken-for-granted knowledge such as hegemonic or essentialist claims to truth; acknowledgement of the cultural and historic contingency of knowledge; as well as the political implications that connect knowledge and practice, and the social contexts that connect education to the wider world.

competitive liberal education; the onus that was placed upon her to gain multiple tertiary credentials; her family's religious beliefs in innate human capacities; added with her experiences of child-rearing, worked together in complex ways to offer Erica⁴ certain subject positions and not others, which resulted in a stance toward education that allowed for certain perspectives and not others.

As a privileged child, Erica's understanding of her multicultural hometown environment was specific and exposed a partial view of the world. According to Erica, her hometown was inclusive and virtuous – values that Erica saw reflected in the 'world-class' school that she attended. Her childhood subject position did not allow for a view of the uneven and inequitable social conditions that characterised her hometown, which sustained a cultural divide between immigrants and the hegemonic elite, and which resulted in the marginalisation of whole sections of the community. The political viewpoint that Erica developed throughout her life history, and which was evidenced by way of her beliefs and practices, was eventually reflected in her contemporary professional capacity. By unpacking Erica's life history, the study was able to garner a more robust understanding of the field of gifted education.

The same process was undertaken with participants 2 and 3: one, a policy-writer at an elite private boys' college, and a powerful member of South Australia's complex gifted education network; the other, a far less powerful public school practitioner who was, in her own words, obligated as part of her job to undertake gifted practice. As a staff member at a SHIP school when the program was instigated in the 1990s, Jenny stated: "Well we had to, we had no choice, we were told to do it."

In all three life histories, themes emerged which together accounted for the ways in which gifted education achieves rule and sustains its practices. Gifted education emerged as an attractive option for all three women: whether through the pressures of a competitive class-bracket, in which multiple tertiary credentials paralleled with acceptance; as a means of positively categorising their own children in accordance with prevailing notions about normality; to access a more powerful subject position in the face of deteriorating domestic conditions; or to maintain employment within an increasingly competitive job market.

All three women spoke, as teachers, about parental pressures. In the most acute scenario, shared by Kath, the tag of 'gifted' emerged as a form of competitively sought-after cultural capital, which was reflected in the way parents would buy their children into gifted classes. In Kath's words, "all hell broke loose" when the selection process for gifted classes was initiated. In both Kath and Erica's schools, elite, high-fee paying sites, the popularity of the classes had burgeoned and become problematic. Both women spoke about the need to alter the pre-requisites for admission.

Given that IQ testing, alone, is no longer accepted within the field as an adequate measure of giftedness, the gamut of testing procedures that have replaced it, along with the eclectic description of giftedness that has opened out space for more children to be included, has resulted in dispute as to where categorical lines should be drawn. Yet, the tenets that uphold gifted practice – the drive for testing and for homogenous groupings – have necessitated division. Both Kath and Erica revealed the strain that imposed upon the elite gifted teacher, who was left, in an autocratic manner, to regulate dividing lines, and by extension, to regulate educational outcomes.

Kath and Erica represented powerful subject positions. The windows onto gifted education that they opened revealed a system of school governance that categorises and divides individuals, generates dissent and competition among wider society, and, by necessity, overlooks marginalised social groups. Jenny, in contrast, represented a less powerful subject position, but one that, by *de facto*, served to support Kath and Erica. Jenny's story showed how gifted education entered the

⁴ Participant names were changed.

mainstream discourse at a time when the New Economism had compressed and narrowed public school teachers' options for acting. Jenny had little choice but to conform to gifted practice. At the same time, the inclusive terminology that helped gifted education gain a foothold in the early 1980s, provided teachers like Jenny with reason to believe their pedagogic practices were indeed [in her words] "damn good for all kids". Any latent concerns that Jenny – as a member of the public teaching fraternity – had about exclusionary teaching practices, were obscured by the benefits that gifted education seemed to impart: in short, professional development in gifted education had allowed Jenny to secure two tenures during periods of increased competition within the mainstream job market. In her own words, training in gifted practice has been a real "feather in her cap" when it comes to securing employment.

CONCLUSION

Gifted education operates through a set of core beliefs and practices, which are dispersed through a composite network which stretches across all levels of the education system and connects South Australia with other states and gifted networks abroad. I argue that the gifted education network was established in South Australia by appealing to the egalitarian ethos of the 1980s, and quickly expanded throughout the 1990s as a result of marketing ploys and appeals to the economy (nurturing our national assets) which fundamentally undermine equal outcomes for all children.

The disparity between gifted education's claims to equality and the uneven social outcomes it produces, are located in its core beliefs. I argue that these beliefs advantage children who, by way of class status and socio-cultural privileges, are predisposed to display greater proficiency in all subject domains, especially those that yield the greatest market-value. At the same time, gifted education's core beliefs encourage divisive practices, which separate the student populace into homogenous groups thereby supporting society's hegemonic power relations: the top two or five percent of elite students are united and promoted through the education system and beyond, while the majority are dispersed toward less valuable subject positions in the marketplace.

Instead of addressing existing social inequalities directly, gifted education supports hegemonic power relations by adhering to the following: (a) an essential belief that intelligence and ability are biological objects which can be measured along a culturally determined scale of normality and which, despite context, are considered to be superior in some people and not others; (b) a belief that children are incomplete, and that they possess individualised needs which must be met if adult fruition is to occur; and (c) gifted education also puts forward the idea that social justice can be achieved through equality of opportunity, yet fails to address the fundamental and historic productions of inequality.

The practices which stem from these beliefs are (a) testing; (b) labelling children according to results; (c) organising children into homogenous groupings; (d) teaching to the individual; and (e) fast-tracking elite individuals through the education system and into the tertiary sector.

In terms of its relationship with social contexts, gifted education's prevailing political character is evidenced both by way of its individualised practices and support for equality of opportunity, as well as its expansion within particular historical epochs. In particular, the development of the New Economism in Australia has seen gifted education strengthen. However, during periods when the national interest has been focused upon social rather than fiscal matters, support for gifted education has waned. In response to the latter, a marked shift occurred in the language that was used to construct the gifted student: terms such as 'inclusion' and 'disadvantage' were injected into policy.

Gifted education, it would seem, has managed to sustain its practices and thereby construct a particular version of the gifted child by appealing to both liberal sentimentality and neoliberal mentality by framing the gifted child as a marginalised individual, and by marketing purportedly

inclusive teaching practices. By simultaneously framing the gifted child as a national asset, by presenting an individualised curriculum amid competitive times, and by meshing with top-down impositions on curriculum without subverting hegemonic power relations, gifted education has harmonised with both liberal-minded practitioners as well as a neoliberal political context.

In terms of social justice, and the question as to whether or not gifted education caters for all children, the research data bears out gifted education in alignment with neoliberal (new economist) politics, while espousing a liberal orientation to education. The implications of this position, for all children, equates to the dominance of some over others. Gifted education imparts individualising practices which support hegemonic power structures by discrediting difference and allowing for only a partial view of the world. That means those students who reign from cultures such as the 'least advantaged' are forced to either assimilate with the hegemonic centre or remain marginalised. By focusing on the decontextualised and innate capacities of the individual, gifted education takes up a stance which deflects attention from disparate social contexts, thereby maintaining hegemonic power relations.

From the viewpoint of the child, it would appear from the study's findings that gifted and non-gifted children alike are in some respects marginalised by the practices of gifted education. Clearly, the non-gifted child is schooled with a tacit awareness of 'lack' in relation to their gifted counterparts. The gifted system appears to filter the non-gifted through the schooling system and toward an appropriate social role with the implicit proviso they deserve to be there, whatever role that may embody within the uneven class system.

The gifted child, on the other hand, is offered a privileged subject position that is in some respects equally fragile. In today's language, the gifted child is different and elite, born to provide for tomorrow's nation. Nevertheless, they are also framed by the prevailing discourse to be at-risk of emotional disorders, plagued by their own genius, vulnerable, despondent, complex, intense, and in need of homogeneity to survive. For both children, indeed all of society, gifted education's separation and compartmentalisation of the human terrain constructs a disjointed social reality, one in which individuals are led to believe that socially constructed differences are innate differences and in which interaction between groups is closed down. Nevertheless, communication at large, it would seem, is needed within Education, indeed among people, if social justice for all is to be achieved.

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