# Governmentality in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand: The effects of a dominant neoliberal discourse on teacher practices with very young gifted children.

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**Abstract**

*The governance of early childhood education, through governmental policy and regulations, modify teachers’ actions with young gifted children; in turn teacher’s modified actions modify the actions of children. This paper is based on research which used a Foucauldian analysis to discern historical and contemporary early childhood discourses to inform the experiences of early childhood teachers who participated in a research investigation into exemplary educational practice for very young gifted children (aged 0-3). A Foucauldian discourse analysis was used with a view to interrupt the dominant neoliberal discourses of education. The allocation of governmental funding is argued to be impeded by the tension between the location of the education and care centre as a public or private space.*

Keywords: giftedness, infants and toddlers, early childhood education, Foucault, governmentality, neoliberalism

## Introduction

The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between people, it is a way in which actions of individuals modify others actions (Foucault, 1982).Within the domain of early childhood education, while there are a multitude of individuals and groups which impact upon the daily actions of teachers in a constant push-pull of power relationships, the dominant neoliberal approach to governance of early childhood education creates particular spaces and places for teachers to enact pedagogy, and for young children to live their educational lives. The governance of early childhood education, through governmental policy and regulations, modify teachers’ actions with young gifted children; in turn teacher’s modified actions modify the actions of children. This paper analyses the experiences of early childhood teachers who participated in a research investigation into exemplary educational practice for very young gifted children (aged 0-3). These teachers participated in the study as they were nominated as ‘exemplary’ teachers in gifted education for very young children by members of the wider gifted and early childhood communities.

If “the constructions of children and childhood in society at any given time demonstrate…the discursive positions that are available for children to experience their lives” (Duncan, 2010, p. 100), then the actions of the government in constructing early childhood education to be enacted in particular forms in particular ways both limit and make available particular discursive positions for very young children to live their lives. For very young gifted children, these discursive positions contest dominant discourses of giftedness; yet it is the point between discourses of giftedness and discourses of the ‘infant/toddler’ that the gifted infant/toddler resides. I will discuss the teachers’ negotiation between economic and educational advocacy discourses and the tensions that are generated when very young gifted children participate within a dominant neoliberal model of early childhood educational provision.

Before entering the body of this paper, I would like to address the positioning of the phenomenon of giftedness as a concept and construct. Within the Aotearoa New Zealand context giftedness is conceptualised through governmental policy as a multifaceted potential for and expression of exceptionality beyond the levels of normative development (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012a). Concepts of giftedness are constructed through the perceptions and values held within the community, but decreed through governmental policy to “be grounded in sound research and theories” (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012a, p. 22). Within the boundaries of this paper, as consistent with a Foucauldian lens, I consider giftedness to be a discursively constructed phenomenon, negotiated and defined through the dynamic of power relationships. Forms of knowledge are legitimised through these discourses, which modifies the actions of teachers, families and very young children. In considering giftedness to be a discursively constructed concept, attention can be drawn to the shifting discursive constructions of ‘giftedness’ within specific settings, across settings, and over time.

The utilisation of a Foucaludian lens to view the experiences of the teachers of young gifted children is only a singular philosophical interpretation, which has served frame these experiences in a certain way at a certain time. However the predominant implications of the findings of this analysis are inferred in the course of this paper, especially the wider consideration of the history, present and future for educational practice with very young gifted and talented children in early childhood. A consideration of the history of early childhood education, specifically the discourses of early childhood, children, and giftedness are initially considered in order to compare and contrast contemporary discourses. An exploration of current contemporary governance of gifted education is examined in relation to the research study participants’ experiences of teaching very young gifted children within the contemporary neoliberal educational milieu will be discussed. Finally the implications of these discourses in relation to current and future educational practice for very young gifted children will be addressed, and questions regarding the contemporary neoliberal governance formed.

## Historical discourses of early childhood education

Within contemporary society, teachers’ actions are modified within a current climate of a ‘political economy’. However, the dominant neoliberal model of education is brought into question when the historical origins of early childhood education are considered. Why was early childhood education formed? What was the purpose of governmental intervention? These questions will be considered within the next section with a view to interrupting the dominant economic discourse.

Early childhood education and feminist concerns have been inextricably linked over the course of history (May, 1993). Discourses and discursive practices relating to women have positioned forms of early childhood as acceptable or shunned. These normalising behaviours (Foucault, 1979) shape the subjectivities of women and children and influence the resultant prospects offered to them within society. The shifting discursive images of women over history have altered governmental approaches and a governmentality of early childhood education over time. These historical discursive images remain influential within contemporary society, and the following section will briefly outline these discursive images and their relationship to the governance of early childhood education.

The purpose of the earliest education and care centres was to act as a welfare service, promoting a care and welfare doctrine which became inextricably linked to the nursery school and later education and care centres. Following on from the expansion of varying forms of early childhood education in England, particularly charitable or church run nursery schools, the desirability of educational and care facilities which would tend to young children were viewed as a relief for poor children who would otherwise be subjected to neglect or sent to a workhouse (‘A Cradle School.’, 1872), as “the object of the institution is to save young children from the evils of being shut up in a room, or locked out in the streets during the working hours of mothers” (‘Thursday, April 22, 1875.’, 1875). These facilities were seen as a community or charitable venture, not a state enterprise.

At these early stages of development, kindergarten was also positioned as a charitable endeavour for underprivileged children (Duncan, 2008; Prochner, 2009). By the early 20th century however, the competing philosophies of kindergarten and education and care centres (including crèches and day nurseries) invigorated a ‘care versus education’ debate. This dichotomy within early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand was ignited by the kindergarten philosophy which supported mothers as first teachers and provided an educational service designed to complement the mothers’ home and child management. Whereas historical childcare centres supported working women, enabling them to keep their children instead of placing them in foster care or orphanages as they worked (May, 2013). This debate was temporarily suspended during World War II, during which time early childhood education and care was supported by both the public and the government as women’s labour was considered essential to the war effort. Governmental funding was supplied for education and care centres to be established to “cater for children whose mothers were engaged in work of national importance” (Department of Education, 1946, p. 3).

A question of the level of state involvement in early childhood education and care services was ignited by the state’s provision during the war. In post-World War II society in Aotearoa New Zealand, early childhood models were again scrutinised through *The Report of the Consultative Committee on Preschool Educational Services* (Bailey et al., 1947), colloquially known as ‘The Bailey report’ to ascertain which forms of early childhood educational provision would be appropriate for the state to be involved in. Kindergarten and Playgroup were deemed to be acceptable, while education and care centres (crèches, full day nursery schools) were not as:

...the whole day long programme is too long, and that young children spending the whole of every day from Monday to Friday in a nursery school are deprived of the vital experiences that only the normal home can provide. (Bailey et al., 1947, p. 11)

Societal positioning of the mother in the home rendered arguments for education and care services redundant (May, 2002). Early childhood education and care which enabled mothers to work was not considered of state concern, and was still positioned as the responsibility of the welfare agencies.

In the 1960s, the emergent feminist movement became increasingly influential in issues surrounding the empowerment of women, and the right to a woman’s personal determination of self. This served to challenge prevalent discourses and discursive practices limiting women to domestic roles (Grimshaw, 1987). In addition to the feminist movement, public furore surrounding poor conditions within crèches and nursery schools led to change within the early childhood domain, with direct governmental intervention in the form of regulatory guidelines for education and care centres, introduced in 1960. By 1969 the government initiated tax allowances for families who paid for childcare services (M. Moss, 1998). Consequently, childcare participation increased 164% between 1963 and 1972 (Pollock, 2012 ). This was the start of a change in the government’s attitude towards the education and care centre (Pollock, 2012).

In 1971 the *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Pre-School Education* (Hill, Dalmer, Taiwhiwhirangi, Cockerill, Harper, & Pinder, 1971), colloquially known as the ‘Hill report’, addressed the inability for kindergartens or play centres to fit the needs of the working mother. Interestingly, they also addressed that working mothers need not be ‘unfortunates’ but may include “a mother with particular training or skill [who] wishes to use it in the community” (Hill et al., 1971, p. 29).

Yet a dichotomy between education and care was still prevalent between education and care centres and kindergartens/playcentres. Statistical reports produced by the Department of Education reported on data relevant to education and care centres, yet clearly compartmentalised their role by labelling them as “Centres primarily used as a temporary substitute for parental care” whereas Kindergartens and playcentres were categorised as “Centres primarily concerned with preschool education” (Barney, 1975). Governmental discursive language reinforced this care versus education debate, reinforcing historic discourses which promote one setting as more desirable than the other.

Up until the 1980’s, education and care centres were still positioned as the ‘underside’ of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, the ideal image of the maternal domestic woman was increasingly challenged through a re-evaluation of the portrayal of the roles women have historically held within the workforce (Clark, Cook, & Pearson, 1983). Contemporary value ascribed to ‘women’s’ professions, including the prestige accorded to early childhood education and care, were also being re-examined. Teachers within education and care centres in this era were amongst the lowest paid workers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The social and political conditions of the 1980s underpinned major governmental changes to early childhood education and care in Aotearoa New Zealand. During this era, areas previously considered to solely concern women (such as childcare and paid parental leave) were openly debated within parliament with a view to promote change, a situation attributed to the increase in the number of female Members of Parliament and their devotion to representing the issues for women in the public (Grey, 2002).

In contrast to the historical view of early childhood education and care as a community endeavour for social good, neoliberal discursive positioning of early childhood education and care promoted individualised benefits from early education, placing responsibility of this education upon families. The treasury department argued that education “shared the main characteristics of other commodities traded in the marketplace and therefore could not be seen as a public good” (Farquhar, 2008, p. 50). In 1988, following the recommendations from *Education to be more: report of the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group* (New Zealand Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988), *Before five: early childhood care and education in New Zealand* (New Zealand Department of Education, 1988)was published, establishing a funding system for education and care centres. The government devolved responsibility from fully administering early childhood education and care, but maintained a measure of control through quality assurance instruments. A regulatory framework was instigated for early childhood education. Funding was provided for centres in return for their assent to quality assurance mechanisms set out through this framework. Over the course of the next few years, these legislative changes decreased child-adult ratios, wages for teachers and mandated minimum teacher qualifications (Austin, 1993). But it is argued that governmental unification of the early childhood education sector has homogenised the sector, and “discursively drawn [educators] into a national manifestation of the will to measure education” (Gibbons, 2013, p. 504). Funding of early childhood education and care was awarded in return for the centres assent to neoliberal forms of measurement which remove “the locus of power away from the knowledge of practising professionals to auditors, policymakers and statisticians, none of whom need to know anything about the profession in question” (Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan, & Somerville, 2005, p. 344). The image of the child as a being of potential future social capital shifted to account for the child’s future economic contribution to society. Within this neoliberal discourse, investment into childhood experience became perceived as ‘quantifiable’ in relation to potential future economic benefits.

## Contemporary governance

### Within early childhood education

Foucault asserts that contemporary governance is no longer concerned with legitimacy, rights or freedom but with the question of limitations and involvement of government in the climate of a ‘political economy’ (Foucault, 2008). Governance within a political economy endeavours to promote competition through “permanent vigilance, activity, and intervention” (Foucault, 2008, p. 132), programming actions for individuals. Currently within Aotearoa New Zealand, the government undertakes actions to programme parental and child involvement in early childhood education. The current government employs scientific discourses which promote the educational benefits for children and the future individual and social capital that can be obtained (National Party of New Zealand, 2014a). Governmental provision of the 20FreeECE scheme and other governmental strategies promote near mandatory levels of involvement in early childhood education and care for children aged three and up (National Party of New Zealand, 2014b). However, financial subsidies to involve children in early childhood education and care are only granted for children over the age of three. Responsibility for the care and education of infants and toddlers is still positioned as a parental obligation. Prior to the age of three children are discursively positioned as ‘better off’ with their parents, after the age of three teacher’s involvement is fore fronted. The historical maternal discourse is invoked through these disparities in provision for infants and toddlers which position their involvement in early childhood education and care to be of less value than children aged over three.

Tensions between feminist perspectives and the economic positioning of early childhood education also prevail. In Stover’s (2013) investigation into the perspectives of prominent historical figures within the early childhood movement argued there was an incongruity between the goals of the feminist movement and economic arguments, and asserts that “feminist goals were co-opted by economic forces” (p. 5) through a discourse of ‘choice’. Choice was perceived by feminists as an enabling discourse, which would support mothers’ decisions to pursue their career choices, but in hindsight was also positioned as a means of restructuring the educational system by “neoliberal reformers who positioned education as a service to be shaped through consumer choices” (Stover, 2013, p. 6).

Contemporary governance of early childhood education and care also regulates provision according to market viability; only centres which can remain financially viable can operate. However these centres are not those which provide the best educational outcomes for children. Within Aotearoa New Zealand a privatised early childhood system has led to a market dominated by corporate providers. The marketisation of early childhood provision is detrimental to families and society at large (Carr & Mitchell, 2009; Meade, 1993; P. Moss, 2009; White & Friendly, 2012). As governmental regulations requires only 50% total qualified staff within an early childhood setting, despite recent findings of the positive correlation between higher rates of qualified staff conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand (Meade, Robinson, Smorti, Stuart, & Williamson, 2012), corporate providers are empowered to maximise a profit from the education of children.

### Within Gifted education

Within current practice, primary and secondary school sectors are afforded clear definitions and provision for strategies for gifted education, whereas policies and strategies for giftedness in early childhood are minimal. There is no document developed by the NZMoE specifically for early childhood teachers to refer to. Early childhood teachers who wish to further understand the NZMoE’s perceptions on the education of gifted children are limited to a single publication which encompasses early childhood through to secondary school (New Zealand Ministry of Education, Bevan-Brown, & Taylor, 2008). Conversely, there are high levels of governmental support for gifted education goals for primary and secondary school children. Teachers are supported with grants for furthering their education in gifted education (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014d) a specialised web resource (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014c) and extensive information on curriculum delivery for gifted learners in the NZMoE publication *Gifted and talented students: meeting their needs in New Zealand schools* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012a). There is disparity in the equity of provision for giftedness between the early childhood and state schooling sectors through governmental legislation and practices. This could be attributed to the dramatic cut in funding for gifted education by the government. The 2009 National budget cut funding to gifted education initiatives in half from $2.82mil, then reduced this even further in the 2010 budget to $1.27mil (McGillray, 2010). The 2013 budget outlined funding initiatives for gifted education, but only for the school sector (New Zealand Treasury, 2013). This disparity is the responsibility of the government to remedy (Quennerstedt, 2009).

The Working Party on Gifted Education considered the needs for early childhood educational strategy within their report in 2001 (Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001), recommending that identification of gifted children occur as young as possible. Early childhood teachers were considered vital within this process. However, while the vision and core principles for gifted education endorse early childhood settings as essential, the key recommendations to instigate change for gifted learners within early childhood settings were not implemented, and no explanation for why this has not occurred has been made public. Additionally, the Working Party was disbanded without the recommendations being addressed. The lack of strategies for early childhood centres further marginalises the importance of gifted early childhood education by the government. Yet, the current government’s recommendations to parents of young gifted children is to consult the teachers within their early childhood service for advice (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012b), stating

If your child is attending an early childhood service or Kōhanga Reo,talk to their educators. They will be interested in knowing all about your child's interests and abilities so that they can support them well. They can also advise you about what to do next and provide contact details of those who can help if more support or information is needed (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015).

However, according to research into teachers’ understandings of giftedness, many early childhood teachers within Aotearoa New Zealand are unable or uncomfortable articulating the definitions of giftedness, some refuting giftedness exists (Keen, 2005). Wong and Hansen (2012) assert that most early childhood teachers would agree with the intentions of gifted education, but insist that the lack of leadership by the NZMoE towards a common conception of giftedness results in a pedagogical paralysis. Wong and Hansen (2012) argue that the “Ministry of Education still does not have any clearly discernible gifted education policies which apply to children in early childhood settings” (p. 9).

*Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996) does not specifically address giftedness within young children. Within the early childhood curriculum of Aotearoa New Zealand, giftedness is either invisible, or positioned as a ‘special need’. Foucault asserts that discourse is “really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this ‘not-said’ is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said” (Foucault, 2002, p. 28). Gifted children are either rendered invisible in their exclusion from *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996)or within the undermining repressive hollow of what is not said about giftedness within the curriculum*.* By being identified as ‘children with special needs’ within *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996) gifted children are discursively positioned.

However, the term ‘children with special needs’ is commonly perceived to be a replacement for the term ‘handicapped children’(Runswick-Cole & Hodge, 2009). Discursive language surrounding early childhood special needs within Aotearoa New Zealand construct the image of a child with a special need as a child with a ‘disability’ (Alliston & Research New Zealand, 2007; New Zealand Education Review Office, 2012; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014b; TeachNZ, 2014). The term ‘special needs’ is also influenced by historical notions of disability, as disability discourse has arguably been supplanted by ‘special needs’ discourse, and is commonly used in a synonymic fashion (Kearney & Kane, 2006; Macartney & Morton, 2009). The discursive image of the ‘special needs’ individual as ‘disabled’ is informed when ability and disability are conceptualised within a didactic relationship, normalising ability and positioning disability as the ‘other’ (Lyons, 2012). Within the domain of early childhood education, special needs is considered to be concerning “children with disabilities” (Dunn, 2000, p. 74). This is reinforced where ERO outlines the Ministry of Education’s definition of ‘special needs’ as “a physical disability, a sensory impairment, a learning or communication delay, a social, emotional or behavioural difficulty, or a combination of these” (New Zealand Education Review Office, 2012). When constructed in this way, gifted children are not considered as children with ‘special needs’, and their inclusion within *Te Whāriki* as a group of special learners is challenged.

The image of a gifted child with ‘special needs’ is contested by elitist discursive images of gifted individuals. This elitist image, endows gifted individuals with an advantaged position within society (Sternberg, 1996). Dominant egalitarian views within Aotearoa New Zealand (Moltzen, 2004) which interpret giftedness as an ‘advantage’ (Working Party on Gifted Education, 2001) equally position individuals with special needs as ‘disadvantaged’ (Kearney & Kane, 2006). Constructing gifted individuals as having a ‘special need’ becomes a problematic action. These multiple images create tensions within the subjective positions made available to the gifted infant or toddler positioned within these contesting discourses.

These discursive images are further problematised within contemporary discourse of special needs, special abilities and priority learners. Inclusive practice is currently mandated through governmental practice designating targeted learners as ‘priority learners’ (New Zealand Education Review Office, 2015), incorporating children with diverse learning needs. This group is defined as children with “special education needs or special abilities” (New Zealand Education Review Office, 2015). It is argued that the term special needs is indicative of children with disabilities, whereas children with ‘special abilities’ relates to gifted learners (Macartney & Morton, 2009). When constructed in this way, gifted children are not considered as children with ‘special needs’, and inclusion within *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996) according to this definition is challenged. As argued earlier, external labelling and relabeling these groups is an act of hegemony, reinforcing their position as the ‘other’ and negating opportunities for “authentic dialogue” (Swadener, 2012, p. 8). Questions need to be asked what this means, not only for the learners grouped within this bracket within early childhood education and care, but the teachers who are expected to work with these groups of ‘priority learners’.

## Early Childhood Education as Privatised Social Policy: Resourcing Education for Gifted Infants and Toddlers

“[P]rivatised social policy” (Foucault, 2008, p. 145) is undertaken by a government who engages and promotes an economic discourse. The contemporary government positions early childhood education as a marketable product which should be regulated, promoting competition in order to stimulate the national economy. The current governmental position argues “since the choice to have children [is] a personal one, educating them [is] a private responsibility (Te One, 2013, p. 9).

Yet there are tensions between the legislative position of voluntary participation in early childhood education, and the discursive normalisation of a near-necessary involvement for all children to participate in order to “get ahead and make the most of their lives” (National Party of New Zealand, 2014b, p. 1). Contemporary governmental apparatuses maintain historical discursive images of early childhood education as a social good through rhetoric (National Party of New Zealand, 2014b) and promotion of the necessity of participation by ‘vulnerable’ groups to correct social inequities (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014d). Early childhood education is discursively constructed to be an investment into the future in the form of ‘human capital’ (White & Friendly, 2012). However, these discursive images of the positive role and impact of the education and care centre within society is contested by historic discursive positioning of the role of education of the infant and toddler as a mother’s concern. Full economic support of the early childhood educational domain is tempered by the consideration that education of very young children is the private responsibility of the family, consequently despite discursive language promoting the necessity and social good of early childhood education, economic support for participation is limited to children over the age of 3 (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015a)

The privatisation of early childhood services by the government of Aotearoa New Zealand promotes economic sensibilities as the optimum governance. Early childhood centres are encouraged to consider “the long-term health and prosperity of the service…risk management…stakeholder reporting” (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014a). Economic discursive language is normalised within the early childhood domain. Teachers and managers of early childhood services negotiate within this neoliberal paradigm of governance, and implement economic discursive practices in their governance of the early childhood environment. Parents are positioned as consumers, and early childhood education as a product for consumption. What does this mean for gifted infants and toddlers who participate within early childhood education? The teachers involved in this research study contested the likelihood of ‘quality’ education for gifted infants and toddlers when market sensibilities guide governance of early childhood education, and economic discursive practice rationalises policies and practices within the educational domain.

One teacher cited instances when there had been limitations placed upon educational resources in her centre based upon claims by management that there were limited funds to purchase resources. This teacher struggled with how an economic rationality affected her ability to effectively extend gifted infants and toddlers. She explains that the management of the education and care centre argued there was little money to put into resourcing as there were few children attending the service. This teacher was concerned that there were limited resources to extend children’s learning in the centre, stating,

it was really challenging…there is not enough for us to use, although they (the management) said, be resourceful, be resourceful.

Additionally, this teacher explained that resources were also limited when the education and care centre was a newly established business, as they started out with few resources for the teachers to utilise with the children. She argues that the educational needs of gifted children who required extension activities were marginalised due to this lack of adequate resources. Management expected this teacher to be ‘resourceful’ and take responsibility for the quality of education provision within the service. This is characteristic of the ‘third way’ form of governmentality (Roberts & Peters, 2008) outlined earlier, in which a co-production of public goods is assumed, requiring individuals to be equally responsible for the provision of quality in the service. Quality education for gifted infants and toddlers is in tension with an economic discourse and a neoliberal paradigm of governance which, in this teacher’s experience, places limitations upon access to resources, and increases expectations upon her personal provision of resources.

Governance of the majority of education and care centres within Aotearoa New Zealand are of private concern (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014e). Distribution and governance/management of these education and care centres are the responsibility of private individuals and corporations/organisations. Economic discourse informs this private enterprise. This discourse is then reified by the managers of centres, in this case exemplified by the manager’s argument that there was not the revenue to provide more resources and activities for the teachers to use with the children. Economic principles inform the rationalisation of the lack of resourcing, but the teacher contested this discursive position, and argued the lack of resources negatively affected her ability to effectively extend gifted infants and toddlers. She also contests the lack of suitable circumstances for obtaining sufficient resources, as despite higher numbers of children attending the education and care centre later, there is still not an adequate level of resources to extend gifted children. She states

…we utilise as much as we can, and our centre has gone through a lot of…changes in the environment, from....nothing to something…I started really early at (name of centre)..and definitely we have much more to provide the children now…we’ve got a healthy roll, and then…we’ve got resources. I wouldn’t say it’s enough or it’s the best, but we’ve got resources.

Despite an increase in the numbers of children attending, this teacher queries the levels of resources within the environment as she feels it is still at an inadequate level. Other teachers in the study also argue that suitable educational resources accessed in a timely fashion are necessary to encourage the learning of the very young gifted child stating “I think that being able to get your hands on something that extends what you’ve seen generally means resources for early childhood”.

The allocation of funds towards centre running costs or private gain is determined by the status of the education and care centre as private (for profit) or community based (not for profit). Some education and care services within Aotearoa New Zealand are community based organisations which channel surplus funds back into the organisation, into sourcing resources for children’s learning and employing high numbers of qualified teachers. The status of the educational service (profit/not for profit) directly relates to the quality of the service, with not for profit providers more likely to produce higher levels of quality (P. Moss, 2009).

One of the teachers in the study expressed explicit awareness of how ‘fortunate’ she was to teach within a community based organisation. An economic discourse also informed her perception of the education and care centre where she worked. This teacher’s centre was a community not-for-profit centre, consequently the management of her centre are governed by the Charities Act (New Zealand Government, 2005) which restricts the management from benefitting from a personal profit from the service. Instead, surplus revenue is required to be channelled into growing and resourcing the service. She explains that in her view her centre these surplus funds have been utilised to extend the learning for a gifted toddler stating:

…the other thing that we are very very fortunate…with our management…the centre is paying for the support worker, three hours a week, because we couldn’t get the um, Ministry of Education to come and visit yet (laughs). Um, so from that perspective, um, we are very very fortunate.

There are two points within this excerpt that I would like to address. Firstly, this teacher describes herself as ‘fortunate’ that within her education and care centre, management who do not seek to generate a profit for personal use from the revenue produced by the centre. The dominance of the neoliberal paradigm in positioning education and care centres as businesses for private profit is highlighted here. Moss (2009) asserts that for profit centres are the growth industry, whereas not for profit centres are in decline as a direct result of the market-driven approach to early childhood education and care. Funding from the government is provided to for profit and not for profit centres alike. This teacher recognises that her experience is ‘fortunate’, rather than dominant practice. While this teacher’s centre is not governed to promote private economic gain, she displays consciousness of the impact of this approach upon other education and care centres, and considers herself fortunate.

Secondly, this teacher addresses that this support worker for the gifted child was employed as “we couldn’t get the Ministry of Education to come and visit us yet”. The lack of governmental support for gifted children in early childhood is recognised as an issue which can only be rectified if the early childhood service has access to funds to privately source assistance. The problem of a lack of governmental support are shared by another teacher involved in the study who argues that this lack of assistance is amplified by teachers’ lack of knowledge and resultant inability to cater to adequately support gifted children’s learning. She contests that parents with a gifted very young child are marginalised through this lack of knowledge and support, stating:

Often parents go looking for help while their child is still a pre-schooler. They have a child who is ‘different’ [teacher’s own emphasis] and they are not sure where to go for help and how to cater for their child without help. Often programmes at school don’t start until year 4 [when children are around 7-8 years old]. Children are often needing extension and enrichment well before this.

The state intervenes to regulate in order “to allow the well-being, the interest of each to adjust itself in such a way that it can actually serve all” (Foucault, 2009, p. 447). According to this teacher, the well-being of gifted infants and toddlers would benefit from regulations promoting specialised education provision within the domain of early childhood education, legislatively requiring all early childhood education providers, both profit and not for profit, to address gifted education within the education and care centre.

Foucault explicates governmentality to be “the tactics of government that allow the continual definition of what should or should not fall within the state’s domain, what is public and what private” (Foucault, 2009, p. 145). The negotiation of the public and private status of the domain of early childhood is in continual flux. As argued earlier within this chapter, the early childhood centre is a privatised domain, but is still considered to be of public interest due to its position as a vehicle for social good. These contesting positions impact upon the interpretation of the level of public funding that should be applied to support gifted education within the domain of early childhood education. As outlined earlier there is a discrepancy between the provision of information and support for gifted education between the early childhood and school sectors. I contend that the allocation of governmental funding is impeded by the tension between the location of the education and care centre as a public or private space.

## Early Childhood Education as Privatised Social Policy: Teacher Qualifications and Ratios

Governmental policies and regulations controlling the early childhood domain promote the market approach to early childhood education. Appropriate ratios of qualified early childhood teachers to numbers of children are maintained by regulatory legislation (New Zealand Government, 2008). There are problems with the lack of discernment between a qualified teacher and an unqualified ‘worker’ in relation to the expertise required to teach in an early childhood setting . It is important to discuss the effects of neoliberalism upon the economic considerations of ‘expertise’ within the education and care centre.

One of the teachers involved in the study experienced specific conditions relating to the qualifications levels of her team, and while this is a single experience represented within the study, there is a concern as to how representative this experience is in the wider early childhood domain. She contests legislation which promotes minimum levels of qualified teachers in the early childhood education and care centre, as in her view the workers lack of a qualification is responsible for their a lack of comprehension of the ‘gifted’ child, stating,

it takes…a lot of effort to go and make sure that…everybody has the same kind of thinking…because it is not really required to have 100%...qualified teachers, even in my area I got only two of us that are qualified.

She explains there are “one and a half” qualified teachers out of a teaching team of five. She is anxious to explain that the centre is not breaking regulations by having low numbers of qualified staff in her area, as they are co-joined with the older children group who have a higher proportion of qualified staff to children. She explains

So what I am saying is for the whole centre, we have enough qualified teachers… the preschool group has got four qualified teachers, in my group there is only two, well one and a half because she doesn’t work full time… that’s a struggle, and it’s not really even manageable.

Despite meeting the standards expected for the education and care centre legislated by the government, This teacher contests the levels of ‘expertise’ within the centre, and argues the minimum level of expertise results in practices which are far from the exemplary status she was nominated to represent by the wider community.

## Conclusion

Foucault examines government as a “practice and problematic” (Peters, 2007, p. 166). Policies and regulations as strategic practices enact and normalise particular ways of knowing and being. These practices are also a problematic as they produce normalised views of educational practice which affect the lives of children and their families. Historical discourses of early childhood education inform present day practices which promote the ‘appropriate’ positioning of very young children within the home setting, but also unsettle neoliberal discourses of education by contesting the contemporary normative discursive image of the role of early childhood as a privatized space.

Disparities in gifted education are challenged by the teachers who are nominated as exemplary teachers with very young gifted children. These disparities are amplified (or possibly generated by) governmental strategies which perpetuate these inequities. The resultant exemplary practice for the early childhood teachers who are ‘at the coal face’ of gifted education is thwarted, and the positive learning outcomes for very young gifted children minimized by discriminatory governmental practices. I contended earlier that the allocation of governmental funding is impeded by the tension between the location of the education and care centre as a public or private space. Early childhood education and care is regulated by governmental procedure, and policy. Pedagogical training and practice is considered to be within the domain of the state; teachers are subjected to regulation by varying governmental apparatuses. However these apparatuses are informed by political economy, contesting ideologies of the public and the private impact upon the discursive field of early childhood. From the profession of teaching to the constitution of the early childhood environment and curriculum, governmentality prevails over every aspect of early childhood education. This governmentality serves to normalise particular discourses and discursive images of gifted children, legitimising knowledge for teachers, children, families and the wider community. If governmentality of early childhood education constructs “the discursive positions that are available for children to experience their lives” (Duncan, 2010, p. 100), then the contemporary neoliberal approach to governance is shaping the educational and wider societal experiences of gifted infants and toddlers and their families in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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