



Transforming teachers' temporalities: Futures in an Australian classroom

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ABSTRACT

There is much rhetoric in education about the ways in which students are prepared for 'the future'. The notion of the future in Australian education is dominantly singular, vague and abstract. This paper describes research which investigates changes which occur within teacher practices, enacted curriculum and student learning. The case study at the centre of this research focuses on a primary school south-east of Melbourne, Australia, which is internationally acknowledged as 'innovative and leading' in 'educating for the future'. Initially, it was apparent that this notion of the future was assumed, and these specific teachers had given little thought to what that future looked like, or how that related to students' learning requirements. As a result of professional learning, the teachers underwent temporal transformation, in integrating explicit futures dimensions within their curriculum. Arising from this research were significant key findings which highlight the need for a reconceptualisation of the ways in which curriculum and pedagogy are enacted in regards to notions of multiple futures. Furthermore, it generates renewed calls for futures perspectives to be addressed explicitly within education. Importantly it highlights a deficit in current teacher thinking about their roles in 'educating for the future'.

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1. Introduction

"The view that one of the key roles of schools is to develop and prepare young people for 'the future' is a given, and rhetoric around this theme has long been a feature of curriculum" [1]. Since the early 1980s, educational and political leaders across Australia have identified themselves as contributing to students' futures. Schools in recent history have, for example, been referred to as *Schools of the Future* [2] and *Lighthouse schools* [3], acting as beacons in the metaphorical waters of life's journeys. Today, there are *Blueprints for the future* [4], *Essential Learnings for the future* [5] and a range of *Pathways* [6] to be explored dependent upon what state or territory a person lives, learns and/or teaches in. Yet, the ways in which these futures dimensions are developed in the school curriculum are not explicitly articulated within the various curriculum documents which guide planning within schools.

I argue that teachers, and schools more broadly do not educate 'for the future'. Furthermore, I suggest that it is not that they do not want to, but rather that they have not thought about it or because they do not know how to. In this paper, I provide a brief overview of the ways in which futures time perspectives (FTP) can be observed as rhetorical within Australian curriculum documents. Further, I outline a research project undertaken in order to interrogate the ways FTP are enacted within a primary classroom. I draw upon data collected during a one year project which sought to marry the ways in which curriculum documents represented FTP, teachers identified within their practices and philosophies, and the ways in which FTP could be articulated within classroom practices. Finally, I summarise the key findings which arose from this study and

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highlight the ways in which the curriculum in the site, and teacher practices changed as a result of ongoing professional learning and support.

2. Research site and methods

The study, referred to in this paper, sought to identify and examine the ways in which futures and temporality influence schools and school curricula and the ways in which schools and school curricula influence teachers' perceptions and enactment of futures and temporality. It was framed within the contexts of:

- Invisible fields of study within mainstream educational practices: futures education and futures studies
- Psychological understandings about how human capacities of temporality and time perspectives develop
- Curriculum documents which demonstrate temporal bias in the ways they are traditionally oriented towards the past, yet simultaneously claim a role in educating for the future
- A school with a time machine which did not go to the future.

The research is based on an individual case study [7,8] undertaken at Wooranna Park Primary School,¹ Dandenong North, Victoria, Australia. It incorporates the perspectives and experiences of six teachers situated within the Grade 5/6 Autonomous Learning Unit (ALU). In this study, I – as participant action researcher [9] – facilitated two types of targeted professional learning to increase the teachers' futures consciousness and understandings of how futures studies could occur within a learning environment. In the first instance, through directed Professional Development (PD) [10,11] the teachers were introduced to the field of futures studies. Through this PD they participated in focused activities intended to raise their futures consciousness and in turn their capacity to reflect upon their teaching through these increased futures perspectives. In the second instance, the teachers participated as a professional learning team (PLT) [12,13]. With ongoing support, as a PLT the teachers collaboratively planned and reflected upon what occurred as they enacted their futures learning within their classroom practices. They also participated in cyclical action research and evaluative interviews in identifying the ways in which futures time perspectives affected their curriculum practices.

Analysis of the data in this research was undertaken through analytic brackets [14,15] which identified the ways teachers spoke about the future (discourse-in-action), in comparison with the ways in which they 'did' the future within their work (discursive practices). It is clear from this research that, prior to the commencement of this study, the teachers had given little thought to the ways in which they 'educate for the future'. Further, amongst the key findings which have emerged from this research, there is little doubt that the introduction of futures time perspectives within the classroom curriculum was transformative.

3. Futures rhetoric in education

Much rhetoric surrounds the ways in which schools engage with the concept of futures. In this paper, rhetoric is used to describe discursive practices, and implies a disparaging or dismissive sense in that I am endeavouring to distinguish between 'empty' words, or 'spin', and action, as a basis for action. Traditionally, rhetoric is described as an 'art of persuasion' [16]. Much of the rhetoric is based on the notion that schools are educating our students for 'their future', and for 'our future'. This suggests that the curriculum is developed with a foresight capacity, yet there is no evidence of what specific future we are educating children for, nor how we will specifically achieve this aim, in the ways that Australian curriculum documents are currently developed. An example of this is presented in the current Victorian Curriculum, the *Victorian Essential Learnings Standards (VELS)* [5]. This document notes that we are educating for a future which is sustainable, innovative and builds strong communities.² The 'future' here is vague at best, and most likely assumes that the ways of the world will continue as they are presently. This is what Inayatullah [17] refers to as *used futures*, where what has occurred in the past, is simply transferred onto a new frame, and the past is reinvented as the future. In this assumption, the curriculum document emphasises the attributes which will be required by the student. These attributes are then assumed to be developed through the enacted curriculum of the document.

These same assumptions were also articulated by teachers during their professional learning. As they thought about the ways in which schooling prepared students for their future, they listed skills which were developed through traditional curriculum, and in this way the future fitted their curriculum rather than the curriculum explicitly responding to a perceived 'pull of the future' [18]. In order to move beyond the rhetoric, I suggest that a shared notion of the envisaged future or an

¹ This study received Ethic Approval from the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee (V200405 100), as well as the Department of Education & Training, Victoria (SOS003027). The school principal and teachers involved in this project indicated that they wanted to be named.

² VELs describes sustainability as "developing an understanding of the interaction between social, economic and environmental systems and how to manage them". Innovation is described as "developing the skills to solve new problems using a range of different approaches to create unique solutions" VELs describes its capacity in building strong communities through "building common purposes and values and by promoting mutual responsibility and trust in a diverse socio-cultural community" (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [5]).

exploration of multiple futures would be foregrounded in exploring curriculum directions. I argue that the formal/written curriculum should incorporate explicit as opposed to implicit futures education.

3.1. *Implicit futures education*

Implicit futures education refers to statements, comments and curriculum outcomes that refer to the future, but are framed as tacit, token or taken-for-granted [19]. Gough argues that a concept of futures is present in all educational discourse, even if it presents as no more than a tacit inference [19]. Such comments and statements do not suggest the ways in which futures concepts will be developed through the curriculum, nor how they have been considered in developing the curriculum. Typical curriculum statements include: “developing citizens of the future” [6] and “personal and civic development of the person” [6,20]. Such claims are broad and not connected to specific images of the future, nor associated with explicit ways in which the curriculum will develop these futures capacities.

There are multiple curriculum areas in which futures education is implicit such as Science, Humanities (History, Geography, Economics and Civics and Citizenship), Environmental Education and Technology. The assumed and taken-for-granted FTP within these curricula are based upon the notion that in thinking about the sustainability of the environment, for example, we are automatically considering the future. Whilst offering a range of important concepts and skills, the taken-for-granted future is often considered in terms of vocational orientation, civic responsibility and lifelong learning. Such approaches tend to be reactive in terms of the future, and more often than not will serve to enforce the status quo through an uncritical adoption of a taken-for-granted future with an unexamined past in terms of worldview. Implicit futures concepts include sustainability, technological futures, change and continuity, civic responsibility, globalisation, vocation and careers knowledge – the future of work and personal development.

Within an implicit futures approach, the learning is described as lifelong, holistic, flexible or ‘just in time’. Alternatively, it is seen in connection with skills associated with problem solving, cognitive development or in preparation for a complex world. In these ways, implicit futures in education may be seen as valuable, but they still markedly limit the ways in which students can engage in, explore, share, shape and critique the possible futures in which they might exist. For this reason, futures education more strongly values futures perspectives, tools and processes which are explicitly developed within curriculum [1,21,22].

3.2. *Explicit futures education*

Explicit futures education as an overarching framework for curriculum work is considered as a ‘missing dimension in education’ [23,24]. Explicit futures education is that which attempts to develop futures literacy, drawing widely upon futures studies literature for processes and content, and expressed in curriculum statements and outcomes that clearly problematised the future. In particular, an important point of departure from implicit futures is the use/inclusion and reference to the explicit knowledge bases, concepts and tools around possible, probable and preferable futures. Explicit futures also consider deep structures using a variety of approaches which encourage exploration of issues at the level of paradigm/worldview [25]. Explicit FTP within curriculum may be identified as those which directly develop temporal awareness as evidenced by relevant standards or outcomes for assessment. Furthermore, they will be apparent through the ways in which curriculum embraces specific futures thinking, and the inclusion of the multiple levels of futures possibilities – personal, local and global.

In examining a sample of current Australian curriculum documents, there is evidence of both implicit and explicit futures time perspectives. In Table 1, I have summarised the key indicators I have used to identify implicit and explicit futures within curriculum documents. Summaries of these analyses have been published elsewhere [26].

Currently, in school curriculum, time concepts are mainly developed through the learning areas of mathematics and history. Mathematics tends to focus on functional time. Functional time teaches children to measure, record and read time from a number of sources, e.g. analogue and digital clocks, calendars, timetables [27]. Effectively, it teaches children to use time to work within the demands and constrains of their society. The other way in which time is developed within schools is conceptually through history. From the early years of schooling, children are taught about different events and times which have occurred in the past. The construction of history, traditionally, is strongly influenced by a hegemonic and political narrative [28]. The dominant content focus of Australian history curricula tends to focus on Australian history (settlement and colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, federation/national identity), ancient and medieval histories and world history (20th century and 21st century).

In the context of this research project, the teachers were ‘much more comfortable teaching history than futures in the beginning’ (Interview). They were experienced in teaching history curriculum which responded to ‘what Australian children should know’ (Interview). They developed historical time through local communities, and more broadly through students’ independent projects on the cultures and countries from which they had come. Whilst there is some attention paid to the basic tenets of time, such as sequencing and chronologisation, and change and continuities [29], the limited development of temporal capacities within children and adolescents is not sufficient. The distinct lack of a parallel or integrated futures perspective highlights an explicit temporal bias within curriculum.

There is much potential for further exploration of FTP within school practices to shift the temporal bias which is currently present. Along with Hicks [30] and Rogers [31], I claim that explicit futures education provides students with greater access

Table 1
Implicit and explicit futures time perspectives (FTP) in curriculum.

Implicit FTP in curriculum	Explicit FTP in curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory claims which link curriculum and school to idea of educating for the future • Document broadly describes the notion of a singular future • Generalised claims which connect what occurs within curriculum to a vague notion of the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum document leads with strong statements regarding the ways in which it educates for the future(s) • Document acknowledges multiplicities of futures • Document contains guiding learning standards/outcomes which might be evident in student learning

to their futures. In increasing a student's futures consciousness, and in equipping him or her with critical futures tools and concepts [32,33], education empowers a student to make critical choices which connect personal, local and global futures possibilities [34]. Without these futures capacities, governments and other powerful agencies [35,36] within culture and societies continue to colonise futures [37]. Thus, in developing such capacities it is important to consider the perceptions teachers hold in regard to their and others' futures.

4. Findings and discussion

In this research, I examined the ways that six teachers at Wooranna Park Primary School thought about their own futures and about their roles in educating students for their futures. I was interested in the ways that teachers enacted their futures perspectives in the everyday experiences within a classroom. My initial claims in this project began with the idea that teachers did not explicitly link their practices within the classroom to their thinking about the future, regardless of the rhetoric which surrounded curriculum documents and the role of schools. In this research, I have collected data which provides insight into teacher views of the future, and further encouraged the teachers to reflect upon their practices to identify ways in which their curriculum explicitly develops notions of the future, or more specifically develops capacities 'for the future'.

4.1. The role of the teacher

According to McGee and Fraser [38], "teaching is both a science *and* an art and effective teachers blend both in ways that transcend a narrow techno-rational (rules and routines) approach to stir the mind, heart and soul" (p. 48). In this study, the teachers were primarily concerned with the ways in which they interacted with students to produce learning outcomes. They considered their roles and expertise as 'generators of knowledge', and 'mediators of students' understandings of the world'. The teachers also recognised 'other roles' outside of this learning context, including pastoral care, emotional support and as 'critical friend'. They achieved this, they reflected, through the diverse range of experiences they provided through their curriculum and school interactions with the students.

Teachers in this study characteristically performed a wide range of activities subsumed under the general heading of 'teaching'. These include planning and designing, demonstrating, guiding, telling, questioning, testing, recording, motivating, criticising and learning [39]. In this setting, they described themselves as mentors and facilitators, in guiding students through various 'learning journeys' (Interview). Drawing upon the Reggio Emilia philosophy [40], emphasised by the school setting, two also referred to themselves as 'protagonists':

Sometimes, I provide problems for my students to resolve. I think of my role as like a board ... someone they can bounce off, and each time they revisit the board there is new learning, or new directions for how the task can be finished (Interview).

There was little talk regarding specific competencies that could/should be developed as a result of the teachers' teaching. Only two of the teachers specifically aligned their roles to the development of subject knowledge. The first teacher's background was as a secondary English teacher, and she was passionate about students' exposure to wide ranges of text:

My role is to nurture a love of literature which will develop readers who will always read. And, if you can read, you can always get new information (Interview).

The second teacher similarly came from a secondary Maths/Science background:

Science helps students to make sense of anything in their world. They need to know that it's not only for a particular group of society. The whole future is based on scientific discovery ... just look at the past (Interview).

There is much work to be done in increasing the connections between these concepts within school practices. In early stages of this study, regardless of the ways teachers described a school's role in educating for the future, they saw their own roles as responding to the particular students in their classrooms, anchored within the context of the present. Whereas the school experiences broadly provided students with skills and capacities for the future, they did not link their specific classroom practices to these broad agendas. Geri exemplified this idea in saying 'I can't think about these kids and the future

until I'm up to date in what I'm meant to be doing now' (Interview). Whilst I cannot claim generalisability of this study, I would suggest that other teachers would respond in similar ways.

From the outset of this research project, the teachers were quite adamant that the role of the school was to prepare students for the future and referred to curriculum documents and other materials which also made these claims. As one queried, 'If we don't prepare students for the future, who does?' (Interview). The teachers were able to locate claims within the VELS document which linked the curriculum to the future. These claims were situated within the preface, but the teachers were unable to locate explicit links to topics of learning which were futures-oriented. Initially, the teachers assumed that because these were the claims of the curriculum documents and other sources, that this was what was occurring. This reinforced Gough's work [19] which claimed that futures in curriculum could be described as tacit, token or taken-for-granted and Hicks' [24] identification of futures as the missing dimension in education.

In this research, the teachers assumed the 'future would just occur' (Interview), which is what Toffler [41] referred to as assumed futures. Similarly, they assumed that everything they teach equips students for some type of future. Specifically, teachers asserted that schools prepared students for the future by teaching them to read and write. They also claimed that specific knowledge assisted them to function within the future. For example, Geri (interview) claimed that the 'maths curriculum helped students to be able to shop, manage accounts and become tradies'. In this way, notions of the future were manipulated to fit the curriculum, as opposed to generating curriculum which would explicitly address the possibilities of multiple futures. There were assumptions which these teachers made about educating for the future which are easily linked to Inayatullah's concept of used futures [17] where curriculum is designed to meet a future which has already occurred as the past. In this research I suggest that, in assuming replications of the past, education does a major disservice to future generations. Toffler [41,42] made these claims previously.

4.2. *Schools and the future*

In retrospect, the teachers realised just how little schools actually encouraged thinking about the future. With increasing futures consciousness, the teachers became more aware of the disjuncture between the rhetoric of preparing students for the future, and the ways in which schools did not explicitly address these claims [1,43]. One reflected upon her own experiences as a secondary teacher, and the limited opportunities the students had had to think about the future:

Look, you often have secondary school students who never get an opportunity to really discuss or think about their own future. It's all rushed upon them in the final years of schooling and everyone's in a panic and course advisors are overworked, and all of a sudden the future is there and they have to think about it. That in itself is a decent reason to do more of this stuff (Interview).

Increasingly, as the project unfolded, the teachers believed that the school has a significant role in educating for the futures. As Masini [44], Slaughter and Inayatullah [45] and Gough [19] would concur, these teachers had become more critical in the ways they were working in the futures domain. They had moved beyond the pop-futures and tacit and token futures which had previously informed their reasons for thinking about the future. In the beginning, the teachers made broad and speculative comments about the future, such as: "I think the world is changing at a very rapid pace" (Interview) and:

Technologies are passing incredibly quickly. And I think we all need to be prepared. We all need to be sort of able to join it in some point in time. So I think it's a very, very important factor in the school (Interview).

Towards the end of the project, the teachers were deconstructing such comments and thinking about the ways in which schools could understand these changes. They also 'felt more in control' in the ways they could develop curricula which would scaffold students' entries into these possible futures (Interview). In this, they also recognised the increasing tensions between addressing the state requirements for education, in contrast to providing 'a real education for many futures' (Interview). In this way, the role of the school in educating for the future became problematic. Bussey, Inayatullah and Milojevic [46] describe current attitudes to futures within education in the same way.

The teachers grappled with the school's role in educating for the future and were often 'shocked that they had not thought about this more' (Interview). At the conclusion of this research, it was clear that their thinking was explicitly futures focused and informed by their experiences and professional learning. Whilst previously the teachers had 'just assumed' that the school did prepare students for a future, they were now more critical in the ways this intent was achieved, or could be addressed through classroom practices.

The teachers often commented that they had never engaged in such futures based thinking in their professional experiences. They enjoyed the opportunities to discuss futures in education and to bring 'these ideas to life in the classroom'. These opportunities had been 'worthwhile' and 'added a whole new agenda' to the ways in which they worked. Sadly, there is a distinct lack of research in this area, and the rhetoric around the role of a school in educating for the future remains rife. One teacher represented the group's thinking in claiming that:

We've always been told that our kids will be doing jobs that aren't around now, but we never guess at what these jobs are, or what the kids will need to be able to do. Schools have to prepare students for many futures outside of work, too. Education really rips kids off ... without the future in it (Interview).

4.3. Teachers making real world connections without futures

Wooranna Park Primary School is firmly committed to providing ‘authentic experiences in student learning’ [47,48]. This is reflected within the ‘pedagogical frameworks in which the school operates’ (Interview). The teachers draw upon a Reggio Emilia philosophy of education which also advocates strong connections and partnerships between the classroom, curriculum and communities [49,50]. Teachers stressed the ‘need to make learning relevant and real’ for their students (Interview). They considered this especially important ‘given the backgrounds that some of these kids come from’ (Interview) and ‘the fact that some of these kids won’t be at school longer than they have to’ (Interview).

Throughout this study, the teachers described the many ways in which their curriculum and other school-based experiences provided the students with ‘ways to understand their world better’ (Interview):

Where there is a chance to help the students to make sense of what is happening around them, we try and build that into our independent learning times as much as possible. I spend a lot of my homeroom time just talking about what is happening with these kids and their families.

However, whilst providing rich, relevant and authentic curriculum, there were a number of subjects or points of interest which were considered highly problematic within these students’ lives and not addressed within curriculum. The teachers considered some topics ‘taboo’ as they arose in discussions about possible futures investigations within the classroom curriculum. For example, they were very concerned about the topic of religion, for fear of parents’ perceptions and possible actions. In some instances, the teachers described how particular children could not participate in activities as the content was ‘not seen an appropriate by his parents’ (Interview). The study of the future, itself, initially was considered ‘worrying’ in presenting information to the parents about what the children would be learning (Interview).

Teachers’ perceptions of the student context influence the ways in which they do and do not engage with futures education and other curriculum [51–53]. Within this study, there were teachers’ perceptions of parental resistance to openly discussing aspects of children’s home lives, for example, religious affiliations, and of parental hypersensitivity to what the teachers deemed as ‘controversial issues’ such as futures education. The teachers’ perceptions of students’ bounded conceptions of the future were also present, and entrenched within classed and milieu practices of what is typically done within schooling and what might be expected [54]. All of these are teachers’ perceptions and may not reflect the actual views of parents, but they drive the ways in which teachers enact futures education. As a result of these perceptions, futures studies is omitted from the classroom practices, thus again making the futures purposes of the school mere rhetoric.

4.4. Teachers, futures and the crowded curriculum

Within this study, teachers often commented that there was ‘never enough time’ to ‘fit everything within the curriculum’ (Interview). In part, this is due to what is often referred to as the crowded curriculum [55], that is, the pressures which teachers face in responding to mandated curriculum documents as well as any other local demands driven by policies or events within the school context and within the confines of its timetable and resources. The teachers experienced this pressure in a number of ways.

As an innovative school, the teachers were expected to work in creative ways, whilst attaining ‘good results in testing and student learning’ (Interview) and to maintain a status as exemplar to other schools of a site of good practice. As the winners of prestigious curriculum awards (2007 Garth Boomer Award – Australian Curriculum Studies Association), the staff and students often played host to other school staff and students, both locally and internationally. As the ‘owners’ of rich and sophisticated technologies, the teachers through curriculum were encouraged to produce multimodal representations of student learning [56] and documentation which would make their learning visible [57]. In providing the rich and authentic experiences for students, which were described earlier, and in competing in external academic programs, these teachers had little time or space to think creatively about different ways of working or to implement particular learning (Interview):

In some ways, we’re overcommitted before we even start thinking about running the classroom. Even if I thought there was a better way, or I could do important things like you’ve taught us ... do you have any idea how hard that would be? Because we’re already doing different things, it makes us even more accountable ... and in some ways it locks us in even further to what we do.

This is reminiscent of an observation Slaughter [58] makes in theorising why it is so difficult for teachers to transform educational practices to include more explicit futures studies:

Typically, there is a minister at the top; teachers and students are at the bottom – not unlike a 19th century army. The ‘meat in the sandwich’ is a layer of bureaucracy that must at all times obey prevailing political priorities. Teachers and students remind one of marginalized, disempowered ‘foot soldiers’ (p. 195).

The perceived control of curriculum from outside the site [59] inhibits the practices and agendas for curriculum and learning within the site. Whereas teachers often identify learning, such as futures education, which is potentially meaningful and empowering to their students [60], their practices are inhibited by the ongoing and competing demands of everyday school life [55] within the context of their particular site and the specific group of learners [61].

4.5. Teachers' views of the future and classroom practices

Teachers do not make connections between their views of futures and day-to-day classroom practices. Whilst the teachers clearly identified the school as having a role in 'educating for the future', they did not see their role as explicitly futures-oriented. Moreover, there was a clear disjuncture in the ways they thought about their personal futures in relation to broader notions of futures, and specifically in connecting their futures perspectives to their practices within the classroom. Interestingly, the teachers all assumed that the other teachers thought about 'the future in the same ways as I did' (Interview). Individual teachers were able to identify some events which could occur in their personal future, and similarly, the teachers each identified things which would occur locally and globally. Often, in this study, the event which was identified would remain there as an isolated occurrence. In this, the teachers did not see the ways that each of their futures images would work alongside the images of someone else. This highlights the complexity of futures thinking [62].

In one session, for example, the teachers were reflecting upon student work samples in thinking about the future. Previously they had concurred that families could take many shapes and forms but effectively the 'essence of a family' would remain unchanged, that is, 'providing a safe place for children to grow into independent people – emotionally, physically, cognitively and spiritually' (Interview). In the work sample the teachers then focused on, one student had suggested that people would live in homogenous talent based groups in the future, and it would be their talents which were nurtured for the benefit of society, as opposed to the nurturing of the person. In this futures scenario, the family was no longer seen as the prime carer and foundation for the child in the world. In their interrogation of this student's ideas, the teachers saw the different ways that the different futures frames interacted:

These students aren't thinking the way I thought they would. I thought you all thought the same as well. I don't like the way some of you are thinking. If your future is right, it will affect all the rest of our futures. My future isn't really only my future, is it? ... I mean I can think what I want about my future, but what if the world's future doesn't work with it (Interview).

In this study, it was clear that teachers were able to 'talk about the future', particularly with the scaffold of the formal PD. I claim through these findings that teacher capacities to enact and integrate these futures perspectives are not realised until increased consciousness of temporality is also developed.

4.6. Teachers equipping students for the future

There were many instances in the professional discussions of the teachers where references to the future were made in regard to their roles. These arose alongside conversations about learning 'which was connected to the world' or in regard to 'making sense of the world'. These teachers lacked futures consciousness with regard to education at the outset of this project. This changed as the project developed. When asked at the outset about the role of a teacher with regard to the future of the student, a common response was:

I've never really thought about it ... I'm more of a day-to-day person, and the future just seems too far away. It's hard enough dealing with keeping up with what is expected without getting ahead of ourselves (Interview)

or:

I do have to equip students for the future, that's my job as a teacher. I've never thought about the actual future, though ... [laughs] ... That makes our job seem a bit more complicated, doesn't it? (Interview).

As a result of increasing the teachers' futures consciousness, this changed. They became more critical of the ways they interpreted and enacted curriculum, and articulated their roles, with regard to the future. With increased futures consciousness they reconsidered the content of curriculum through the lenses of 'what future was assumed in teaching this stuff' (Interview). At the conclusion of the PD sessions and the PLTs, teachers noted that once they became 'aware of the future, I notice it everywhere. It's like someone turned on a futures switch' (Interview).

4.7. Teachers' uncertain futures

I have already described the ways in which teachers have taken the future for granted. More specifically, in this study, the teachers assumed that the future would 'just occur as it always had' (Interview). As the PD sessions drew to a close and the PLT commenced, the teachers were anxious about the ways they would 'teach about the future' (Interview). Teachers asked questions in regard to starting points for classroom discussions and activities to commence curriculum development. The questions, such as 'do we just ask them what they think of the future?' (Interview), appeared quite simplistic, but in this study serve to highlight the limited futures thinking teachers have undertaken, and the alienness of explicitly addressing futures thinking within curriculum.

The teachers were concerned about how they would 'deal with things which might come up, and make the future pretty bleak to the kids' (Interview). They were also concerned about the negative images that some of these students had, and how

these could be ‘avoided in the classroom for everyone else’ (Interview). In some instances, the teachers were limited by the assumptions they held about student futures, which in many ways reproduced the ‘hopeless feelings some of our kids have . . . you only have to see where they come from’ (Interview). After many of our early sessions together, I noted the ways that the teachers ‘almost perceived the future doing things to them’ or in other instances ‘merely waiting for the future to arrive’. From phrases such as these, the teachers and their students were positioned as passive, and the future as active. It was a repressive force to be feared, in its unknown shape – inaccessible, looming and unfamiliar. This was interesting as a counterpoint to other descriptions of a future which will replicate the past. This notion of competing futures perspectives, or futures in counterpoint within a person’s thinking, might form the basis of future research in this area.

4.8. Teachers and students sharing futures

The teachers were increasingly enthusiastic about teaching futures studies within their classroom as they observed their students’ engagement within the curriculum. In reflecting upon this, the teachers theorised two key explanations which contributed to this finding. The first was around the notion that this curriculum was closely linked to their lifeworlds. The second theory was ‘because it was all about them and their futures’ (Interview). There is much literature written about the possibilities for connecting students’ learning to their lifeworlds [63,64], personally and more broadly. In this study, the teachers observed that the students were using their own lifeworlds to contextualise futures thinking:

The only way the kids could think about what might happen was through the ways they know the world . . . So when I asked [student] to think about something, I noticed this cycle of thinking . . . It started with his family now, broadened out to the world now, then some kind of thinking about each for the specific futures task and then he brought it back again. So with everything he was learning it was moving in and out of his life . . . and he loved it (Interview).

In this, Penny described the explicit links which were being made between the learning which occurred within the curriculum and the ways that *the student* could apply these understandings within their worldview. Thomson [65] in her work within disadvantaged settings argues that this is an empowering approach which assists students to more critically access their worlds.

5. Conclusions

Whilst providing some insight into the promise and possibilities of futures education within curriculum, this study raises questions for policy makers and curriculum writers in their claims about educating for the future. This study is significant for teachers in rethinking their expertise and roles in educating students, particularly in regards to an explicit futures dimension. In this research, futures studies offered these teachers professional learning, as well as an open-ended curriculum space which had previously not been negotiated. Teachers are busy and hard-working people. As highlighted in the data, they are increasingly under pressure to reform their practices at regular intervals [55]. In some instances those changes occur through curriculum knowledge and in others through curriculum implementation.

Futures studies is significant in schooling and in the daily lives of people. In order to become more realised within school practices and policies, greater attention must be paid to equipping teachers to facilitate new ways of thinking. Teachers require support – physically, emotionally and intellectually – in adopting change [66]. Teacher transformation in this project occurred as a result of sustained and varied approaches in supporting teaching learning [67] and in scaffolding teachers’ induction to futures thinking. Moreover, the collaborative nature of professional learning provided a rich forum for identifying and addressing uncertainties and gaps within teacher’ futures consciousness and knowledge.

There is much to be learned from this study. Schools are under enormous pressure to introduce “new” aspects of curriculum. Futures education is not a new aspect of curriculum – it is an undervalued aspect of curriculum. I argue that, as educators, we need to be critical and discriminating in offering our students open-ended, relevant and temporally inclusive learning experiences. Further, we must support each other in the production and dissemination of professional knowledge. As the ongoing cycle of curriculum reviews are undertaken and new curriculum documents flourish, it is crucial that we rethink the role of schooling. It is only through a renewed sense of what school aspires to achieve that we will effectively and critically refocus an attention on the possibilities which exist within a multiplicity of futures.

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