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Foucault and Special Educational Needs: a 'box of tools' for analysing children's experiences of mainstreaming

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ABSTRACT   *Research on children with special educational needs in mainstream schools, based on simplistic notions of integration, has revealed very little about the nature of their school experiences. A Foucauldian perspective is proposed as an alternative, and the relevance of his methodology, which focuses on formal and informal discourses, and his analyses (particularly of medicine, madness and discipline) is discussed. It is argued that Foucault offers a set of strategies or a 'box of tools' (1977a, p. 205) for understanding how the discourses on special educational needs construct both the pupils' experiences in mainstream schools and their identities, as constructed subjects and objects of knowledge. The paper ends with a brief illustration, from work in progress, of what a Foucauldian analysis might look like.*

Research on the mainstreaming of children with special educational needs has tended to concentrate on the *amount* of integration taking place, seldom moving beyond crude notions of how much time a child spends in an ordinary school or classroom or 'inventories of human and physical resources' (Slee, 1993). Hegarty (1993) argues that integration is an unsatisfactory construct which is open to simplistic and erroneous uses and Oliver (1985) is critical of what he sees as a lack of any theoretical basis. As Fulcher (1989) points out, however, integration is a highly political process which 'constructs patterns of social relations in classrooms and in the wider educational apparatus' (p. 53). It is important to find new ways of understanding the complex experiences of children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools and this paper explores the potential contribution, in both substantive and methodological terms, of Michel Foucault. This is examined in relation to other approaches to theorising special educational needs and some criticisms of a Foucauldian approach are discussed. Among the most important of these is Foucault's failure to undertake any empirical work within institutions. The paper concludes with a brief example, from work in progress, of what this might entail.

Foucault and Special Needs: domains of knowledge and types of power

The work of Foucault has significance to the study of special education (within the UK and beyond) in two respects. First, his analyses of medicine, madness, and discipline and punishment have relevance to the experiences of children with SEN. Foucault describes how the patient, the madman and the criminal are constructed through disciplinary techniques, for example, the 'medical gaze' (1973, p. 29). Children with special educational needs could be said to be constructed in similar ways. Secondly, he offers a methodology or a 'box of tools' (Foucault, 1977a, p. 205) which makes it possible to analyse both the official discourses on special educational needs and those operating within schools and classrooms. Ligget (1988) argues that it is necessary to become conscious of the 'institutionalized practices in terms of which disability is constituted' (p. 264) in order to broaden the scope for political action. She warns, however, that the enormity of a Foucauldian approach should not be underestimated.

The Subject and Power

Foucault's main interest is in the ways in which individuals are constructed as social subjects, knowable through disciplines and discourses. The goal of Foucault's work has been 'to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture human beings are made subjects' (1982, p. 208). In *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973) and *Madness and Civilisation* (1967), Foucault traces changes in the ways in which physical and mental illness or abnormality were spoken about. Foucault employs a distinctive methodology for these studies, archaeology, which aims to provide a 'history of statements that claim the status of truth' (Davidson, 1986, p. 221). Foucault's later work, *Discipline and Punish* (1977b) focuses on the techniques of power that operate within an institution and which simultaneously create 'a whole domain of knowledge and a whole type of power' (Foucault, 1977b, p. 185). This work is characterised as genealogy and sets out to examine the 'political regime of the production of truth' (Davidson, 1986, p. 224). Both archaeology and genealogy are concerned with the limits and conditions of discourses but the latter takes into account political and economic concerns (Shumway, 1989).

Foucault draws parallels between the disciplinary mechanisms within modem prisons and educational practices. Contemporary approaches to discipline and punishment, and education may be regarded as more humanitarian than the systems of the past, but Foucault argues the converse. The effects of the mechanisms of power, he contends, are to construct individuals as subjects in two senses: as subject to someone else, through control and restraint, and as a subject tied to their own identity by their conscience and self-knowledge. 'Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to' (Foucault, 1982, p. 212).

Surveillance

A central theme of Foucault's work is the way in which the 'gaze' constructs individuals as both subjects and objects of knowledge and power. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault illustrates how the medical gaze opened 'a domain of clear visibility' (Foucault, 1973, p. 105) for doctors, by allowing them to construct an account of what was going on inside a patient, and to connect signs and symptoms with particular diseases. The space in which the gaze operated moved from the patient's home to the hospital. This became the site for the teaching, as well as the acquisition of medical knowledge, the object of which was the body of the ill patient. The body of the madman, according to Foucault, was viewed as 'the visible and solid presence of his disease'. Hence, the medical gaze focused on the body and 'normalisation' or treatment of the insane involved 'consolidation', 'purification', 'immersion' or 'regulation of movement' (Foucault, 1967, pp. 159–172).

In his genealogical analyses of discipline and punishment and of sexuality, Foucault describes how 'techniques of surveillance', which occur in what he terms the 'local centres of power/knowledge' (for example, in relationships between children and adults), have an individualising effect:

> In a disciplinary regime... individualization is 'descending'; as power be-
> comes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exer-
> cised tend to be more strongly individualized... In a system of discipline,
> the child is more individualized than the adult, the patient more than the
> healthy man... when one wishes to individualize the healthy, normal and
> law-abiding adult, it is always by asking him how much of the child he has
> in him. (Foucault, 1977b, p. 193.)

Techniques of surveillance are so sophisticated, argues Foucault, that 'inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is everywhere' (1977b, p. 195). Foucault identifies three mechanisms of surveillance:

- hierarchical observation;
- normalising judgements;
- the examination.

These techniques appear to shape many of the experiences of children with special educational needs and are considered below.

Hierarchical Observation

The perfect disciplinary apparatus, according to Foucault, 'would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything perfectly' (1977b, p. 173). Foucault describes how the technique of 'panopticism' (based on the design of Jeremy Bentham) was first integrated into the teaching relationship in the eighteenth century so that pupils could be observed at all times:

> In order to help the teacher, Batencour selected from among the best
> pupils a whole series of 'officers' —intendants, observers, monitors, tutors,
> reciters of prayers, writing officers, receivers of ink, almoners and visitors.

> The roles thus defined were of two kinds: the first involved material tasks…
> the second involved surveillance (Foucault, 1977, pp. 175–176).

Foucault views this mechanism as both efficient, since surveillance was everywhere and constant, and effective, because it was 'discreet', functioning 'permanently and largely in silence' (1977b, p. 177). It also supervised those who were entrusted with the surveillance of others.

Provision for children with special educational needs in mainstream schools has elements of this kind of surveillance. Children placed in a mainstream classroom are usually under constant surveillance. This supervision is hierarchical in the sense that many pupils are accompanied in mainstream classrooms by special needs auxiliaries or teachers; learning support specialists devise and oversee their programme of work and monitor how the mainstream teacher is coping with the child; headteachers also need to be kept informed of progress of recorded pupils in order to communicate this at formal review meetings to educational psychologists, parents or other individuals. The surveillance does not stop at this point, as a network of reciprocal power relationships has been created:

> this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised. (Foucault, 1977b, pp. 176–177.)

All children are the objects of scrutiny within schools, but for pupils with special educational needs, the gaze reaches further. They are observed, not only at work in the classroom, but also during break times. The way in which they interact with mainstream peers or integrate socially is often viewed as equally important, if not more so, than their attainment of mainstream curricular goals. All aspects of the child's interpersonal relationships can, therefore, be brought under the vigilance of staff. The emotional well-being of a child with special educational needs is also cited as an important aspect of special education. This legitimises the search *within* the child for signs, for example, that he or she is happy or gaining confidence, to a degree that teachers would not scrutinise mainstream pupils. Surveillance of pupils with special educational needs enables professionals to show concern for their welfare and acquire knowledge about their condition and the progress they are making. It also constructs them as objects of power and knowledge:

> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (Foucault, 1982, p. 212.)

Normalising Judgements

Foucault observes how the Norm entered education and other disciplines, 'imposing new delimitations on them' (Foucault, 1977b, p. 184). While this standardised education and promoted homogeneity, it also had an individualising effect, 'by

making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another' (p. 184). Children with special needs are defined in relation to normality. The 'cut-off' point, where a child is or is not deemed to require a Record of Needs or a statement is in no sense clearly defined, however, and variations in levels of recording and statementing have been a source of concern to administrators and others. Some children who are not recorded, but who are seen as having special educational needs by parents or professionals, are thought to be disadvantaged by not having a label which distinguishes them clearly from 'normal' pupils. In a climate of resource constraints, distance from the norm has become valued.

The Examination

This technique, argues Foucault, combines hierarchical observation and normalising judgement, and 'establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them' (Foucault, 1977b, p. 184). In education it has taken a less ritualised form than, for example, in medicine, where the medical gaze allows doctors to construct an account of what goes on inside a patient, connecting signs and symptoms with disease. Three features of the examination enable it to function as a disciplinary technique:

- It imposes a principle of compulsory visibility, holding subjects in a 'mechanism of objectification' (Foucault, 1977b, p. 187);
- Individuality is introduced into the field of documentation. This makes it possible to classify individuals, form categories, determine averages and fix norms;
- Each individual is established as *a case* and may be 'described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality'. This individual may also have to be 'trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc.' (Foucault, 1977b, p. 191).

Foucault sees the examination as at the centre of the techniques that render an individual an object of power and knowledge.

In the assessment procedures leading the opening of a Record of Needs or statement the child's individuality is established, both in relation to normal standards of ability and differentiated within a particular category (despite official rejection of categorisation). Thus, two children with Down's syndrome will be judged differently once other factors such as difficulties, personality and home background are taken into account. Before a multi-disciplinary assessment of a child with special needs takes place, the suspicion of abnormality needs to be voiced. This may occur at birth, when doctors observe genetic defects or trauma affecting the brain or later on, when parents or teachers become concerned. The nursery or school provides a space where parents and teachers can compare a child against norms and any gaps provide evidence of abnormality.

By the time the child undergoes a formal assessment, there is usually little doubt

as to the existence of an abnormality or a special educational need, although this notion of difference is itself socially constructed. The multi-disciplinary assessment, conducted from a variety of perspectives (for example, medical, educational and psychological) attempts to gain as much information as possible about the child and his or her home background, but is primarily a political and social process (Galloway *et al.*, 1994). This form of examination:

> clearly indicates the appearance of a new modality of power in which each individual receives as his status his own individuality, and in which he is linked by his status to the features, the measurements, the gaps, the 'marks' that characterize him and make him a 'case'. (Foucault, 1977b, p. 192.)

Following the assessment, the child with special educational needs is marked out for perpetual surveillance throughout the remainder of his or her school career and beyond. Parents and professionals also come under scrutiny as part of the continuous review of the recorded child's needs. All are caught by a gaze which is 'always receptive to the deviant' (Foucault, 1976, p. 89) and the very existence of 'abnormalities', such as special educational needs, provides a further rationale for surveillance of the general population (Ryan, 1991).

A final aspect of Foucault's analysis which appears relevant to the experiences of children with special educational needs is spatialisation.

Spatialisation

Foucault showed how the practice of medicine, which began as a classificatory discipline, underwent two metamorphoses, becoming a medicine of symptoms before emerging as the clinical medicine which exists today. These were characterised by changes in the spatialisation of disease and of medical treatment. The medical gaze altered the perceived space in which illness has its origin and distribution and the clinic 'was probably the first attempt to order a science on the exercise and decisions of the gaze' (1973, p. 89). The treatment of madness also underwent radical change with the birth of the asylum as a punitive space. Foucault described the asylum as:

> not a free realm of observation, diagnosis, and therapeutics; it is a juridical space where one is accused, judged, and condemned, and from which one is never released except by the version of this trial in psychological depth— that is, by remorse. Madness will be punished in the asylum, even if it is innocent outside of it. (Foucault, 1967, p. 269.)

The 'superposition' of the child and his or her special educational need, 'no more than a historical, temporary datum' (Foucault, 1973, p. 3), has led to an often emotive debate over the source of learning difficulties. Deficit and curriculum models, both of which have validity, also have their dogmatists. The space in which special education is provided is also significant in relation to claims that a child is integrated. Ideal notions of integration are largely concerned with children with special educational needs and ordinary children sharing spaces, with the most

pervasive sharing perceived as the most successful. Locational, social and curricular integration tend to be regarded as progressive stages for pupils with special educational needs, but it is the increased physical proximity that is subjected to maximum surveillance and cited as evidence of integration.

Archaeology, Genealogy and Foucault's Analytical 'Tools'

Archaeology, which characterised much of Foucault's earlier work (1967, 1972, 1973), facilitates a 'descriptive' account of discourses, essentially a history of statements that stood for the truth (Davidson, 1986). In special education, we should not be asking why we have become 'integrationist', rather how did integration and not something else come to be the dominant discourse within special education? This requires illumination of the discontinuities and oppositions within the special education discourses. Groups representing individuals with, for example, hearing impairment, aphasia or specific learning difficulties, some of whom have advocated segregation, or at least separate specialist provision, need to be part of this process.

Foucault's later genealogical pursuits (1976, 1977b) focus on power/knowledge relationships within institutions and reflect a shift of Foucault's interests from discourses to 'discursive practices' and from a macro to a micro level of analysis. He urges others to analyse the 'micro-physics of power' (1977b, p. 29) by searching for 'points of resistance' (1976, p. 95). For pupils with SEN, this would involve looking for evidence of them challenging the identities they are given or opting for alternative experiences.

The main 'tool' or strategy which Foucault uses within archaeology and genealogy is one of reversal. This entails examining official discourses which point to a particular conclusion, usually positive, and considering the implications of an opposite outcome (Shumway, 1989). In Foucault's studies of sexuality and madness he employs reversal to striking effect, showing, for example, that sexuality is not repressed and silenced, but is part of a whole proliferation of discourses. Discontinuity, another of Foucault's devices, encourages the search within historical discourses for gaps and disjunctures, because, he contends, this is where change occurs. It requires abandonment of conventional notions of history as continuous and progressive, and seems significant for special educational needs, given the complacency with which the 'Warnock watershed' has come to signify enlightened progress. Finally, specificity and exteriority require us to understand individuals and phenomena rather differently. Foucault cautions against regarding phenomena, such as special educational needs, as outside the discourses about them. Rather, the discourses which construct the phenomenon should be examined in the context of the particular period in which they were uttered. The discourses should also be viewed at their exterior, as unmotivated and unintentional (rather than having an internal rationality or irrationality). These strategies should be helpful in examining both formal and informal discourses on children with SEN which may include or exclude them from mainstream.

Other Approaches to Theorising Special Educational Needs

Two polarised models have tended to predominate the conceptualisation of children with special educational needs. A deficit model attributes difficulties to within child factors and could be located within an essentialist perspective. A curriculum model, on the other hand, looks for features outside the child. These might include the teaching approaches used and the attitudes of those who interact with the child and are embedded in a social constructionist view of disability. Within this perspective, symbolic interactionists (e.g. Goffman, 1963) examine how individuals try to cope with their labels and control the information the public receives about them through strategies such as 'passing'. Whilst this is helpful, we are left with a sense that 'shameful difference' is inevitable (Abberley, 1993).

Social constructionists aim to discourage the use of all labelling or categorisation (a major criticism of the deficit model) and the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED, 1993) claims victory on this point:

> A distinctive system of labelling pupils has been replaced with a description of their learning needs (p. 5)

Curiously, the SOED makes a promise in the same document to provide curriculum materials for discrete groups of children with moderate learning difficulties, physical difficulties, etc. This is hardly surprising since categories (based on notions of deficit) continue to be useful to teachers and others in identifying and meeting needs.

The anti-labelling stance of social constructionists has been criticised by Soder (1989) as dangerous:

> This well meaning denial of the problems of disabled people is developing as a professional ideology in a time when service structures are undergoing changes that in themselves tend to make the needs of disabled persons invisible. Segregation is abolished and integration, deinstitutionalisation and decentralisation is being implemented. The driving forces behind this development are twofold. First there is the well intentioned ideological commitment: not to label and treat separately, but to integrate. Second the financial crisis of the state that motivates the search for less expensive alternatives. (p. 255)

Abberley (1993) argues that disabled people are disadvantaged by the failure to recognise their 'special, "abnormal" requirements' (p. 111), while Oliver (1992) is highly critical of a 'linguistic attempt to deny the reality of disability', by referring to disabled people as 'people with disabilities' (p. 21).

An alternative perspective, proposed by Abberley (1992) and others (e.g. Fulcher, 1989; Oliver, 1990) is defined by them as a social creationist:

> The essential difference between a social constructionist and a social creationist view of disability centres on where the 'problem' is actually located. Both have begun to move away from the core ideology of individualism. The social constructionist view sees the problem as being located

within the minds of able-bodied people, whether individually (prejudice) or collectively, through the manifestation of hostile social attitudes and the enactment of social policies based upon a tragic view of dis-ability. The social creationist view, however, sees the problem as located within the institutionalized practices of society (Oliver, 1990, pp. 82–83).

A social creationist perspective views disability as oppression and takes account of the material, environmental, social and psychological disadvantage experienced by disabled people. Whilst condemning the social production of impairment, the social creationist asserts the value of disabled living and demands 'that difference not be merely tolerated and accepted but that it is positively valued and celebrated' (Oliver, 1992. p. 25). It adopts a political stance, demanding changes in state and welfare provision to improve the material conditions for disabled people and it is this imperative that distinguishes it from a Foucauldian perspective. The aim, according to Abberley (1992), is to develop a social theory which connects:

> the common features of economic, social and psychological disadvantage with an understanding of the 'material basis of these disadvantages and the ideologies which propagate and reproduce them'. (p. 244)

The rights of disabled people to articulate their wants rather than needs is also a fundamental part of the social creationist perspective. There is, however, a plurality of voices among the disabled and able bodied, and there is no guarantee that a social creationist will allow all of them, particularly the least articulate and powerful, to be heard. It may not be possible or appropriate to establish a single theory of special educational needs which achieves the aims cited by Abberley for all disabled people and Corbett (1993) warns against merely replacing one form of dominant discourse with another.

One perspective which does allow for a plurality of voices, providing they themselves do not become dominant, is post-modernism. Corbett (1993) argues that this would enable interrogation of the metaphors of special edu-cational need such as 'obstacles along a track' (Warnock, 1991) and 'territorial boundaries' (Booth, 1992). She suggests playfully that the shift from segregation to integration has been post-modern, not out of place among other contrasting characteristics with modernism/post-modernism (e.g. distance/participation; centring/dispersal) cited by Hassan (1980). She deconstructs the metaphors of track and territories, and challenges the discourses of enlightened modernity with which integration is associated. These are shown instead to be part of the barriers preventing the participation of disabled people. Tracks, she argues, are stratified to produce winners and losers, with disabled people among the latter group; territories continue to be defended by professionals, but Corbett suggests that the 'struggle for ownership of the body, an invaded territory of professional occupation' (p. 550) has had some success.

Where does Foucault stand in relation to these perspectives? One of the

problems in trying to answer this question is that he denied any labels ascribed to him:

> I think I have in fact been situated in most of the squares on the political checkerboard, one after another and sometimes simultaneously: as anarchist, leftist, ostentatious or disguised Marxist, nihilist, explicit or secret anti-Marxist, technocrat in the service of Gaullism, new liberal, etc....None of these descriptions is important by itself; taken together, on the other hand, they mean something. And I must admit that I rather like what they mean. (Rabinow, 1984, pp. 383–384).

Said (1984) suggests Foucault is best understood as perhaps the greatest of Nietzsche's modern disciples and as a central figure of oppositional intellectual life in the twentieth century West. His ideas, if applied to special educational needs, seem to be located somewhere between social creationist and post-modern perspectives, but not entirely in either. While he would share the views of the social creationist about disability (and disablism) being located in the institutionalised practices of society, he does not specify how these might be overturned. He does not, for example, argue for changes in the material conditions of individuals in the way that Abberley and others have done for disabled people. In common with post-modernists (if they can stand being regarded collectively) he recognises the plurality of voices and urges researchers to find the means to hear these, but fails to set an example. Kiziltan *et al.* (1990) suggest that education is embedded in post-modern discourses and Foucault's symbiosis of power and knowledge is particularly post-modern. In the sense that Foucault challenges the metanarratives of modernity (for example, progress, coherence and rationality) and uses strategies of reversal, it does seem appropriate to view him as a post-modernist, if labels of any kind are helpful. The final section of the paper explores the extent to some of the criticisms which have been levelled at Foucault might limit a study of special educational needs which takes this perspective.

Criticisms of Foucault

Habermas (1986) and Rorty (1990) see the problem with Foucault as lying in the tension between:

> the almost serene scientific reserve of the scholar striving for objectivity on the one hand, and, on the other, the political vitality of the vulnerable, subjectively excitable, morally sensitive intellectual. (Habermas, 1986, p. 103.)

Rorty thinks it should be possible to be both objective and political, by making a more effective distinction between them and labels him the 'knight of autonomy' (p. 2). Habermas, on the other hand, sees Foucault as ultimately unable to make value judgements and denounces him as a pessimist. This particular charge is an important one for education and is considered more fully in this section. First, however, is the criticism of his treatment of history.

'Fast and Loose' Historian

Foucault's approach to history is to isolate central components of social institutions and trace them back in time. In so doing, he shakes the cosiness that historians have traditionally enjoyed in the relationship of the past to the present (Poster, 1984, p. 74). As Shumway (1989) points out, he does not deal with a discipline directly, but rather describes its archaeology, 'which in this instance means the layers of sediment upon which it is built' (p. 159). He has been accused of playing 'fast and loose' with historical data and time, selecting arbitrarily from sources (Megill, 1979) and Poster (1984) remarks that it is little wonder that he has been criticised by historians, since 'the evidential basis of the texts is odd and incomplete' (p. 73). Megill, however, also argues that to accuse Foucault of inaccuracy is to miss the point of his work (1985). He contends that Foucault is best treated as an animator—not as an authority.

Foucault eschews the notion of searching for origins and seeks instead:

> to cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked as the face of the other. (Foucault, 1984, p. 80.)

By beginning with a diagnosis of the present situation, Foucault then makes it possible to ask 'How did we get here?' This requires attention to minute deviations within discourses which does not sit easily with charges of inaccuracy or selectivity.

Pessimism

> You would never guess, from Foucault's account of the changes in European social institutions during the last three hundred years, that during that period suffering had decreased considerably, nor that people's chances of choosing their own styles of life increased considerably. (Rorty, 1990, p. 3.)

Perhaps the most serious criticism of Foucault's work is that he offers no recipes for social change. Foucault advocates local and continuous action to effect small changes but as Shumway (1989) points out, 'his work does little to encourage or instruct anyone interested in undertaking such action' (p. 158). In addition, he insists that power necessarily entails resistance, but 'gives the impression that resistance is generally contained by power and poses no threat' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 57). This criticism is particularly important for educationists, who may feel that there is little to gain from pursuing an analysis that denies (or at least fails to acknowledge) the possibility of action. It has been argued that it was Foucault's intention merely to 'diagnose the contemporary danger' (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1986, p. 118) and that it is for us to resolve the conflict between his analyses and social change (Said, 1986). Fairclough (1992) sees the problem as arising from his tendency to reduce practices to structures and the absence in his work of 'real instances of people doing or saying or writing things' (p. 57). This point is returned to later.

It may be that Foucault has been misunderstood and that he does indeed offer hope, especially for educationists. A key to this could lie in Foucault's interpretation of enlightenment. Kant's response to the question 'What is enlightenment' was to define it in three ways; unconditional freedom to think, to think publicly and to submit thoughts to doubt before public. This is, however, to adopt a highly transcendental understanding (which sees knowledge as having universal structures, independent of humans) which Foucault did not share. His notion of enlightenment is one which offers 'a critical ontology of ourselves', which:

> has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (Foucault, 1984, p. 50.)

This sounds far from pessimistic and for educationists, seems to offer prospects of rethinking and evaluating educational practices. If education is approached with the 'limit-attitude', characterised by 'dissimilarity, constant decentring, endless deferral and recurring doubt' (Kiziltan *et al.*, 1990), it could:

> translate into endless reconstructions, bringing about transformations in various aspects of public education, ranging from curricular to organizational restructuring. (Kiziltan *et al.*, 1990, p. 366.)

Rorty (1990) and Roth (1992) share the belief in the capacity of Foucault to transform education, providing, as educationists, we 'begin surveying the closure and repetitiveness in our own thinking.' (Roth, 1992, p. 695). This requires us to 'overcome our prefabricated self and fashion a new one courageous enough to dwell, nay thrive, in uncertainty' (Roth, 1992, p. 693). As Kiziltan *et al.* (1990) comments:

> In the labyrinth-like environment of the limit-attitude, life is guided not according to the promise of light or universal sociability but by a commitment to the overcoming and thus constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects, an inherently collective project which always remains a beginning with each step we take, and each rearrangement of the maze that we coinhabit together. (p. 369)

For disabled people, however, there is a double bind, since as Ligget (1988) points out, the price of speaking out about themselves is the acceptance of the disabled/non-disabled distinction, within the normalising society. This could well perpetuate, rather than challenge, disciplinary practices, but it is a risk which, arguably, is worth taking. Research has an important role in trying to find out how individuals become constructed subjects. This requires attention to what goes on in classrooms and other institutions.

Empirical Analysis

This final criticism relates to Foucault's failure to undertake any empirical work within institutions, despite contesting that it is the key to uncovering power/knowledge relationship. Foucault claims that it is vital that social institutions are studied from an internal standpoint since they:

> constitute a privileged point of observation, diversified, concentrated, put in order, and carried through to the highest point of their efficacity (Foucault, 1982, p. 222).

He is not, however, entirely convinced that institutions themselves are likely to yield conclusive evidence:

> One must analyse institutions from the standpoint of power relations, rather than vice versa, and that the fundamental point of anchorage of the relationships even if they are embodied and crystallized in an institution, is to be found outside the institution. (Foucault, 1982, p. 222.)

Foucault has remained something of a global theorist, although as Fairclough points out, he claims to be talking about practice: 'his focus upon structures is intended to account for what can and does actually happen' (p. 57). This does not mean, however, that empirical analyses of institutional practices cannot be accomplished and there are already some persuasive analyses of educational management (Ball, 1990) and psychology (Walkerdine, 1984). Yet even these do not show us how the disciplinary techniques work by providing examples of what is and isn't said. Foucault's box of tools might help us to understand the experiences of children with SEN in mainstream schools, by developing an analytical framework which allows the informal and formal discourses which have constructed children with SEN to speak.

An attempt to analyse the experiences of children with SEN from a Foucauldian perspective (Allen, 1995) has been illuminating. Accounts from pupils with SEN and their peers had the following characteristics:

- pupils with SEN did not have fixed identities (as disabled or normal), rather they were in a continual process of identification, within various discourses (e.g. medical, charity, rights);
- mainstream pupils' identification of pupils with SEN was an ambivalent process, full of oscillations, contradictions and uncertainty;
- resistance by pupils with SEN was multifarious and included being ready to repair any transgressions which highlighted their disability (two girls with visual impairment), or claiming a different disability (a boy with emotional and behavioural difficulties);
- mainstream pupils operated a mini regime of governmentality, allowing them to draw boundaries around acceptable and unacceptable behaviour towards SEN pupils, but this too was full of ambivalence;
- within this regime, resistance was often reconstructed (e.g. as naughtiness or an example of their 'difference') or dissolved (by simply ignoring it) by pupils, acting 'for their own good'.

What can a Foucauldian analysis of discourses contribute to our understanding of pupils' experiences of mainstreaming? It can at least promise to avoid meaningless accounts of integration, which say more about where a child is educated than about anything else. The kinds of experiences which pupils with SEN have in mainstream might become a little clearer if we start to look for ways in which these are constructed for them through discourses which depict them, for example, as 'objects of pity' or 'sources of inspiration' (Shapiro, 1993). As far as improving these experiences is concerned, this might be possible if we take up Shumway's suggestion to 'add Foucault and stir' (p. 161). That, surely, has to be worth trying.

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