A recognition of outcomes-based assessment practices from a Foucauldian perspective

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Abstract

Assessment in *Curriculum 2005* is premised on a progressive learner-centred, outcomes-based approach where observation, monitoring and surveillance are key processes advocated for success in learning (NDE, 1997). This paper argues that despite the seeming liberatory nature of outcomes-based assessment, optimism is this regard must be mediated by an understanding that 'invading privacy' may be one of the most disturbing aspects of the above-mentioned processes at work. The paper highlights some of the tensions evident in outcomes-based assessment practices in a well resourced senior South African school. An exemplary situation that captures this argument is drawn from my doctoral study and analysed through a Foucauldian lens wherein he forges a connection between increasing surveillance, on the one hand, and escalating control and regulation, on the other (Foucault; 1998). The paper is guided by the question: What forms of power and control are carried within the new forms of assessment? The literature review focuses on relevant concepts of Foucault's work to highlight the problematic nature of outcomes-based assessment for learners. Several implications emanating from the analysis for assessment in South Africa are then examined and discussed.

Introduction

The significance of this paper lies in its contribution toward a theory of power relations in assessment practices which, in addition to extending past macro-level theories, will account for patterns in the micro-level circulation of power and disciplining of bodies in South Africa. Moreover, this study contributes to such theory from a unique empirical base. To the extent that power relations are central in the micro-level enactment of pedagogy, and that

enormous continuities over time are evident in the character of what occurs among teachers and students, a theory of power relations in pedagogy which identifies patterns and specific practices in such a way that enables new points of intervention to be explored, has the potential to make a substantial contribution not only to educational theory, policy, and practice but also to social theory more generally.

The relevance and pervasiveness of postmodernism in most spheres of human existence is such that it should not be ignored in educational assessment practices (Hargreaves, 2002). The application of one of these postmodernist doctrines and its practice to educational assessment practices is central to this paper, which justifies its use as a point of entry into the discussion. The paper generates the problematic of power in assessment practices, employing a theoretical framework which is grounded in a conception of power based on the work of Michel Foucault (1977). In this paper I argue that outcomes-based assessment in some respects epitomizes progressive educational themes yet, when studied with an eye toward productive power reveals several contradictions and paradoxes. I support my argument with empirical evidence drawn from my doctoral study conducted in a grade 8 class-room in a South African secondary school. The Foucauldian tools of analysis are then described and applied to an exemplary assessment situation in order to demonstrate the technologies of disciplinary power within the new forms of assessment and what this technology does to teachers and learners when they become involved in it. The implications of these practices of power are then discussed.

Postmodernism, inter-subjectivity and assessment

Postmodernism and its ancillary wave of radical changes such as globalization and progress in information technology have called for a fundamental paradigm shift in the philosophy, structure, and contents of educational policies worldwide (Mockler, 2004). Assessment policy reform has been a common trend on both international and local levels resulting in significant implications for practice. The key principle underpinning the shift is the move from the 'objective' to 'inter-subjective' perspective of assessment. In traditional processes of assessment; the assessor (whether a teacher, researcher or stranger administering a group or individual test) is seen as a detached 'eye' and views the testing event from an objective distance, outside the universe of the person assessed. That distance assures the objectivity of the score. This perspective has been criticized on account of its preoccupation with measurement of rather than the learning itself. Postmodernists advocate an 'inter-subjective' perspective which is believed to provide greater empowerment in learning. Bruner argues that inter-subjectivity is

> the human ability to understand the minds of others, whether through language, gesture or other means. It is not just words that make this possible, but our capacity to grasp the role of the settings in which words, acts and gestures occur. We are the inter-subjective species par excellence. It is this that permits us to "negotiate" meanings when words go astray (Bruner 1996: 20)

Outcomes-based assessment policies introduced in South Africa have a post-modernist approach: they are characterised by collaborative and self-directed inquiry using democratic and dialogical assessment strategies such as self-, peer- and group- assessment strategies (DoE, 2000). These policies embody 'inter-subjectivity' in their quest to foster

empowerment at the 'micro' level of bodies, through students becoming self-regulating and active participants in their own learning.

Almost all questions in educational assessment it would seem are more or less connected with the issue of power. In fact, "Power has become one of the central concepts of the social and human sciences *per se*" (Clegg 1989, xviii). In terms of existing empirical studies of pedagogy, while there is a vast body of literature on pedagogy, there is little empirical work that attends both to issues of pedagogy and to issues of power. Although Bourdieu (in his work with Passeron and others) and Bernstein provide the most sophisticated and detailed analyses of power and pedagogy, even their work on this topic lacks a substantial systematic empirical base (Gore, 2002). Bernstein's (1990) theory of power (related to Marx) is derived from mapping societal power relations and showing that pedagogy is implicated in the production of those relations through its rules (regulative, distributive, contextualising, etc.). Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) view of pedagogy as symbolic violence is based on Weberian notions of authority and the emphasis is on how large discourses are imposed on, and taken up by, the body (Gore, 2002).

My own view, derived from Foucault, goes beyond Bernstein's (1990) declaration that pedagogy is more than a relay for power relations external to itself to *demonstrate* how the power relations inherent to pedagogy govern and regulate bodies and knowledge and to show that discourses are constructed out of pedagogy itself. From my perspective, power is not simply the imposition of one will on another. Its subtleties and nuances are taken into account in a way that acknowledges the complexity of classrooms in which there is much more going on than the imposition or reproduction of broader societal power relations. In terms of existing studies of assessment, while there is a vast body of literature that concentrates on macro-practices of assessment, very little energy is dedicated to the micro-level of analysis. The study from which this paper is drawn is designed to bridge that gap by examining micro-practices of power in classroom assessment practices.

Classroom assessment practices are therefore regarded as both central and peripheral to this paper. The unveilling of technologies of power in classroom assessment practices occurs, here, on two levels: locally, in a study of outcomes-based assessment in classrooms, and discursively, on the value of a Foucauldian analysis of power for educators. The two stories work concurrently. Foucault's analysis of productive power provides the theoretical grounding for a study of power operating in assessment practices. In turn, the study of power in assessment practices serves to illustrate gaps in the predominant ways power is addressed in outcomes-based assessment contexts. Rather than offer a full-scale genealogy of classroom assessment practices, I contribute a genealogical snapshot of one particular transition in teaching practice, namely the shift from so-called 'traditional' assessment to 'outcomes-based' assessment frameworks of organization.

Background to the study

The site for the broader study was Suburban High School (pseudonym); a grade 8-12 building located in the suburbs of a very large, metropolitan area with a human population numbering in the millions. The observations at Suburban High School were conducted within teachers' classrooms in the subject areas of Mathematics, English Main Language, and

Arts and Culture. The key participants in this study were three teachers in the learning areas of Maths, Languages (English Home Language) and Arts and Culture and their respective learners. Although a small sample limited any possibility for generalizability, this case study research dug deeper and looked more broadly than would be conceivable with some commonly used quantitative methods. Data reduced from interview transcripts and video-recordings resulted in thematic perception generalizations toward 'inter-subjective' assessment practices at Suburban High School. Although the broader study explores more fully the concept of 'inter-subjective' assessment practices, for the purposes of this paper only one of these elements, namely, collaborative learning practices is given priority. Therefore, this paper looks closely at the configurations of power inherent in peer-assessment practices and the kinds of subjects it produces. The question that guided this aspect of the research was: How are patterns of power currently determining the students' experiences of assessment, and constructing students' image of self, others, and the world?

Theoretical framework

As discussed earlier, the theoretical framework for the paper is grounded in a conception of power based on the work of Michel Foucault (1977). Key features of this conception of power are that power is productive and not solely repressive, that it circulates rather than being possessed, that it exists in action, functioning at the level of the body, and that it operates through 'technologies of self', that is, that individuals are active in their own subjection. Foucault's conception of power (power relations) requires a focus on the mechanisms of pedagogy rather than on individuals or groups who might traditionally have been seen as holding power. Hence, the primary research question was "What specific practices actualise relations of power in assessment?" While other scholars and researchers in education have engaged with some of Foucault's ideas (e.g., Ball, 1990; Cherryholmes, 1988; Jones and Williamson, 1979; Marshall, 1990; Meredyth and Tyler, 1993; Walkerdine, 1990), this paper aims to demonstrate, rather than assert, the applicability of Foucault's thought to the study of power.

Foucault's concept of disciplinary power explicitly shifts analyses of power from the 'macro' realm of structures and ideologies to the 'micro' level of bodies. He argued that unlike the sovereign power of earlier periods, disciplinary power functions at the level of the body:

> In thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their action and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives. (Foucault, 1980, p.39) (emphasis added)

Foucault (1980) elaborates the invisibility and pervasiveness of power in modern society: "The eighteenth century invented, so to speak, a synaptic regime of power, a regime of its exercise within the social body rather than from above it" (p.39). Using the exemplar of the Panopticon, with its normalising surveillance, Foucault described disciplinary power as circulating rather than being possessed, productive and not necessarily repressive, existing in action, functioning at the level of the body, often operating through 'technologies of self'.

Of significant relevance to the strategy of collaborative assessment practices is the metaphor of the panopticon. Perhaps the most-discussed section of Michel Foucault's Discipline and

Punish is his description of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, a system of surveillance originally designed with penal institutions in mind, but that has become a metaphor for the much broader and more subtle intrusion of observation and record-keeping techniques into more and more areas of social life (Foucault 1977: 200-209); see also Poster (1990) Foucault (1980); Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) Bernstein (1990) Bernstein's (1990) Passeron (1977: 69-98). The basic idea of the panopticon is straightforward: a central tower or structure has windows on all sides, and it is in turn surrounded by a ring of cells occupied by the inmates, the open sides facing inward. Observers can look out in any direction, at any time, to see what any inmate might be doing. Furthermore, since the inmates cannot see into the central observation tower, every window or observation point does not, in fact, need to be staffed all the time; the possibility of being observed has a deterrent effect even when inmates are not in fact being observed. And, still further, as inmates become accustomed to this environment, and to the routine of assuming that they are being observed at any/every time, it becomes less important for the observation tower to be staffed at all; the structure of the environment is what exerts control, as people internalize changes to their habits and movements without remembering the original circumstances that necessitated them. The panoptic condition becomes part of the identity of an inmate ("a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy" (Foucault, 1977: 200)).

Several deeper conclusions for this study follow from Foucault's discussion. The first is that such mechanisms of surveillance tend to become more pervasive: for example, few people even notice any longer how frequently they are monitored through partially hidden video cameras (from the bus, to the bank, to the store, to the parking lot, to the elevator). This is one of the central themes of Foucault's book: that as the mechanisms of surveillance and control become more subtle and 'humane', they become more extensive; they actually become more controlling in their effects, but with less complaint.

In addition, I drew on the work of Gore (2002), who has developed a descriptive theory of the way pedagogy functions in classrooms from Foucault's analysis of power and existing studies of pedagogy. The following working definitions were adapted from the work of Gore (2002) in order to cover a wide range of micro-techniques, or practices, of power in assessment.

- **Surveillance:** Supervising, closely observing, watching, threatening to watch, avoiding being watched
- **Normalisation**: Invoking, requiring, setting or conforming to a standard, defining the normal
- **Exclusion**: Tracing the limits that will define difference, boundary, zone, defining the pathological
- **Distribution**: Dividing into parts, arranging, ranking bodies in space
- **Classification**: Differentiating individuals and/or groups from one another
- **Individualisation**: Giving individual character to, specifying an individual
- **Totalisation**: Giving collective character to, specifying a collectivity/total, will to conform
- **Regulation**: Controlling by rule, subject to restrictions; adapt to requirements; act of invoking a rule, including sanction, reward, punishment

- **Self(/r/t/s)**: Techniques/practices directed at the self by researcher, teacher or student

Using these theoretical tools, I conducted multiple analyses of data, including the application of two sets of coding categories to the data—the first set designed to identify techniques of power derived from Foucault and a second set emerging from a grounded analysis of the data. In this paper, however, the analysis is limited to findings emerging from the first coding process.

Given clear patterns evident from the qualitative analysis of these data, an attempt was made to quantify the results in order to identify patterns in the proportion of each practice of power relative to the other practices within subjects, and to make comparisons between subjects. Furthermore, each coded segment has been analysed, in a more contextualised way, for the object of the particular practice of power, the specific way in which the technique of power was enacted, the direction of the exercise of power, and any reactions or consequences evident. Sites in which reflected a variety and multiplicity of codes were marked as 'critical incidents' for further comparison and analysis.

Background to 'critical' incident

The incident is drawn from a grade 8 English Language lesson in which, 'clauses' in sentences is assessed through a collaborative group experience. The incident captures power issues in the build-up to main assessment activity in which pupils are put into groups and assessed on their performance of a task. The teacher, Jenny introduced the topic by building on a section she started in the previous lesson. She used varied methods to disseminate information to pupils including 'chalk and talk', the use of the overhead projector and the distribution of worksheets to pupils. Pupils were seated in traditional rows (one behind the other) for part of the lesson and then moved into circular formations for the group-activity. Jenny positioned herself at different monitoring points during different stages of the activity. Prior to this critical incident Jenny had explained what a clause is and provided various examples thereof. The students were then asked to copy some of these explanations and examples from an overhead transparency. Jenny then embarked on a process of distributing students into groups for the peer-activity. Students were then engaged in group-work. During the activity, which became rowdy, Jenny repeatedly asked for better behaviour from the class. These requests were polite at first and then became firm commands. She then outlined a detailed procedure in which each group was given a specific "focus-group" for the peer-assessment. The final stage of the activity culminated in the performance of the required task in the front of the class and the peer-awarding of marks on a rubric.

On a structural level of analysis, almost midway through the lesson and also at a very strategic point (the critical incident at which the assessment was introduced), the entire ethos of the lesson dramatically changed. The classroom became a flurry of activity with an engagement in learner-centered activity involving much group-work and peer-group assessments. The teacher's role appeared to change radically and she walked around the class as opposed to her 'objective' stance in the earlier half. Her position of observation took on an 'inter-subjective' form (Bruner, 1996). The teacher handed out 'rubrics' to learners. It was significant to note that although there was much query on the 'rubric' in use, not much information was forthcoming from the teacher. She reminded pupils that their marks would

be recorded. The analysis reflected a classic case of the lesson splitting neatly in two as the assessment came in. It could almost be perceived as though the assessment was perceived as an intrusion into her classroom. Questions of why a very strongly structured and planned lesson suddenly loosened up into this strange amalgam of peer assessment was found to be weird in the extreme and provided an immediate avenue for further exploration. An attempt is account for this question further in the analysis.

Discussion of findings

Initial levels of analysis revealed that there were comparatively high levels of surveillance, regulation and distribution in terms of the exercises of power by the teacher in relation to the students. Classification was used by both teachers and students. When used by teachers it was used nearly as often for disciplinary purposes as it was for instructional purposes.

Surveillance

In the site, surveillance was mainly exercised by the teacher in relation to the students and evident primarily in relation to classroom management. Surveillance was found to be strongly linked with regulation. However, there was some surveillance of the teacher by the students; student surveillance of the teacher took the form of watching to ensure the teacher wasn't watching their own (unacceptable) behaviours. Surveillance took both visible and articulated forms. Surveillance also was used as a pedagogical technique by having students watch each other's performance (physical skills, role plays). Objects of surveillance included students' movement (in and out of the classroom, their placement in groups, their participation and objects they touch (especially objects they should not touch), their activities, class-work (progress, assignments, books) and behaviour. In the site, surveillance was mainly used to gain student attention but rather than using threats or disciplinary action, more subtle techniques such as making eye contact and circulating among students were used. There was also formally sanctioned surveillance or students' attendance and of their performance on the task (in a teacher's journal). Students were constantly under surveillance in relation to behaviour (noise, restlessness, inattentiveness).

Regulation

In the site, regulation primarily centred on student behaviour and was directed from teacher to students. It was also found that regulation was more concerned with assessment requirements and negotiated class rules. The recording of information in a personal journal may also be seen as a formal device in regulating student behaviour. Although it appears to serve as an instrument for recording student progress and so assist in providing evaluative feedback to students it was perceived by students as a symbol of authority and so served to implicitly regulate behaviour (inferred by their seriousness each time she monitored the actions of a particular group).

Distribution

In the site distribution was mostly used as a disciplinary tool. Distribution was used by the teacher to unify her actions and the content of lesson, as well as to organise students. By students, distribution mainly took the form of individuals differentiating themselves by actions such as coming in late, arranging themselves or their bodies in particular ways. Circles and group work were an interesting commonality across all Jenny's lesson sites.

Normalizing judgement and examination

Normalization occurred mostly in invisible ways in the incident, yet its prominence in visible ways was also noted: *Teacher: "grade 8's you know that we respect other people when they are presenting…"* . Invisibly, Jenny's body language ensured cooperation, at times it was her presence either in the front of the class or close to a group that created a disciplinary effect. This was exemplified in cases where students looked in the direction of their teacher and stopped talking, smiling, fooling around etc. Normalising patterns were also implicit in student to student direction (his raised eyebrows were interpreted by his friend as a symbol of caution and he too became quiet and attentive…). Although the positions in space both of teacher and learners had served as explicit ways of normalising behaviour, their body language appeared to play a more dramatic role (Jenny's body language- stance, expression, gestures were used to gain attention and cooperation from learners).

In summary, the first layers of analysis revealed that: (1) these practices of power occurred in rapid succession, often overlapping, and were enacted by teachers and students alike--hence, supporting Foucault's view of power as circulating; (2) none of the sites was free of these techniques of power; (3) there are identifiable patterns in the circulation of power which enable claims to be made about the relationship between these techniques of power and various evaluation strategies such as peer-assessment, use of group-work, journals and portfolios.

From the snapshots of each technique at site, the following preliminary findings in terms of assessment can be reported:

- There was proportionally greater functioning of surveillance, regulation and distribution when an element of assessment was introduced into the setting by the teacher.
- There was a stronger functioning of normalisation in the setting when an element of assessment was introduced.
- The spread of techniques was greatest when the assessment element was introduced into the setting.

These points are opened for argument in the following section.

Issues and arguments

a) There was proportionally greater functioning of surveillance, regulation and distribution when an element of assessment was introduced into the setting by the teacher.

The teacher's strategy of 'mini circles' for the peer-assessment activity could be seen as progressive in the sense that it is a more humanistic, egalitarian arrangement of persons as opposed to the old "objective" row-by-row seating design of traditional assessment. This could also be perceived as 'in line' with the "inter-subjective" assessment philosophy of Outcomes-based assessment. Yet, ironically, from a Foucauldian standpoint, a circular arrangement is in fact a more effective panopticon, since every member of the circle is continuously visible to every other member, all the time. Again, even when one is in fact not being observed, at any moment one might be, and that is all that matters. Therefore all

members of the groups (circles) in the classroom could be seen as conspirators in the panopticon, observers and observed; what the teacher did not see, others did.

Foucault argues that the panopticon, is not a simple physical structure, machine, or spatial arrangement: it becomes a way of life. As people accept the inevitability of being observed and recorded, their habits change; they change. As people become more visible, the omnipresent circumstances that observe and record their lives become less visible. As the 'private' domain (the space of activity that is in principle unobservable, unrecordable) has become more and more circumscribed, an alarm about its now being 'invaded' seems ironic, for the real issue is with how that domain has become already so compromised; yet these restrictions, because they are often consensual, implemented gradually and with good sensible reasons, are actually more pervasive and insidious and hence harder to resist. This trend was evidently manifested in the patterns of resistance in the lesson: Resistance was evident on a very small scale and only on the entry of the "assessment" into the lesson. Resistance escalated with the introduction of the performance task, and proliferated during the first parts of the task and then died away completely. The resistance was a spontaneous reaction to something new, which when discouraged through the acts of surveillance by the teacher gave way to conformity, hence subjectification.

Foucault's work also highlights an interesting paradox: spaces of free action are increasingly circumscribed by restrictions on freedom (1977). These paradoxical tendencies come together in the idea of an 'architecture'—not merely the physical architecture of buildings (or panopticons), but the social architecture of ways of living. 'Architecture' can be seen as the locus where capabilities of creativity and mechanisms of control come together: architectures both contain and exclude, and the analysis of distinctive architectures can reveal important dimensions, and limitations, of human freedom. The 'group-work' context is seen as such an architecture in this study; while a medium that is enormously powerful and susceptible of immense collaborative learning (peer-assessment) learning uses, it includes constraints (as does any medium) on how information is shared, what sorts of information can be shared, and how people can communicate. It both enables and inhibits.

Within this educational contexts, this paradox is of fundamental importance for thinking about the relation of new technologies to learning and human freedom: the very same devices that allow the creation, exploration, and sharing of new knowledge and information, that spark new possibilities of action and interaction, also facilitate a heightened degree of observation and record-keeping about what people actually do.

One can avoid using such devices, in order to resist having one's freedoms compromised in one sense—but only at the expense of giving up the other kinds of freedoms and opportunities that those new technologies make available. A life without schooling—may in one sense be less panoptic, and more 'free'; but this freedom is obtained only at the cost of forgoing a number of other opportunities.

b) There was a stronger functioning of normalisation in the setting when an element of assessment was introduced

The relatively stronger functioning of normalisation than other techniques in the radical settings provides some explanation for the kind of 'resistance' educators encounter from students when they attempt to enact radical pedagogies. If power relations are inescapable in pedagogy, then whatever techniques are most strongly experienced are likely to encounter resistance.

Foucault said "there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised" (Foucault, 1980).

Together, these findings show, as Foucault puts it: *It seems to me that power is 'always already there', that one is never 'outside it',* that there are no '*margins*' for those who break with the system to gambol in. But this does not entail the necessity of accepting an inescapable form of domination or an absolute privilege on the side of the law. To say that one can never be '*outside*' power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what. (Foucault, 1980, 141-2) It is also important, in all of this analysis, to remember that Foucault sees power as productive. For instance, he says of surveillance that it is a "mechanism inherent to pedagogy". In this analysis, my aim is not necessarily to suggest that we should attempt to alter power relations in these sites or that these configurations of power are negative. Instead, I am concerned, as a preliminary step, to attempt to understand in detail how power operates.

c) The spread of techniques was greatest when the assessment element was introduced into the setting.

The assessment activity, seen here as the 'examination', produced both positive and negative forms of energy for students and teacher alike. Students were clearly enjoying the task (evident from their body language and articulations) and this may be perceived as positive. On a negative note, the performance of the task made some students anxious and withdrawn (evident from body language). In a positive sense the teacher's plans were taking shape as students were co-operative, yet her constant anxiety with student control could be seen as negative. The teacher also appeared to reflect anxiety relating to the student perceptions of the task. It was almost as though she felt in-secure with the lack of formality surrounding the assessment and its formal implications in a formative sense: She constantly reminded that them that the assessment was important: "*Now guys remember…this is going into …your…um…portfolios hey….so do it properly.*"

The introduction of the assessment into the lesson appeared to interfere with the order and formality that the teacher had established in her previous traditional seating arrangements. The teachers' regulative control increased and reached extreme proportions towards the end of the lesson. It was obvious that the teacher fore-grounded the 'controlling functions' of the assessment rather than its 'educational purposes.' The first of these are those reforms which focus on assessment, evaluation, and, more specifically, curriculum as the means to educational improvement. These contrast with reforms which aim at more independence at the classroom level, where teachers are given the freedom to match their instruction to their children. What she is pointing to is the fact that in many respects the efforts to control

teachers and manage education serves instead to deaden instruction. By implication, the best hope we have to reach true excellence is to let go, to quit trying so hard to control. If we redirect the energy that we expend on these efforts to gain control, it might be applied to educational purposes instead of management ones.

Many reformers seem to feel that the only way to ensure that good education is going on in individual schools and classrooms is through good administration; supervision and accountability are the routes to good education (McNeil, 2002). What McNeil's analysis suggests stands in opposition to this 'common sense' point of view: good teaching can be chaotic and uncontrollable, and so the movement to control education directs us inevitably to bland mediocrity. The 'contradiction' is that efforts at control result in just the sort of defensive teaching that sticks as closely as possible to the defined curriculum and prepares students for the expected tests, which is what the reformers began by trying to change; the intellectual life is sucked out of the classroom.

In serving the social control function, the teachers, themselves both transmitting and being acted on by power, become part of the process by which the young are disciplined, and they themselves are controlled by the same forces (Foucault, 1977). The social control McNeil (2002) points to is two-edged; the students are controlled by the teachers, but both teachers and students are controlled and shaped in ways much more subtle and difficult to detect.

This is the working of power in its disciplinary form. Conformity is not the result of overt force that visibly bends the will of those subject to its operation; conformity results from the constant working of invisible constraints that bring us all toward the same 'normal' range of practices and beliefs (Foucault, 1977).

There are, we should note, serious deficiencies in Foucault's notion that everything reduces to power. His work at times becomes almost theological in tone; his faith that everything is reducible, finally, to power obscures the ordinary and valuable distinction between power and authority; his view that discipline is imposed on us as an effect of power makes us blind to Dewey's sense of discipline as a relationship between us and the world as we pursue our aims. Nonetheless, a Foucauldian analysis does serve to point to the extent to which we underestimate the complexity of 'the discipline problem' in schools, and the inadequacy of the pre-packaged programs sold to teachers as remedies.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have provided an overview of the study and of some of the findings that have emerged from the first site of coding categories applied to the data. The presentation is very technical and emphasises categorisation at the expense of contextualisation (Maxwell and Miller, 1993). From the outset I have wanted to conduct a systematic analysis of power relations in order to theorise from a strong empirical base. My aim, ultimately, is to produce a more flowing style that conveys in more narrative form the operation of power in these sites at the same time as I work towards a sociological theory of power relations in assessment.

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