# DISCIPLINE AND NORMALISATION IN THE NURSERY: THE FOUCAULDIAN GAZE

CHRIS HOLLIGAN

SYNOPSIS

In this paper we provide a Foucauldian critical analysis of empirical data derived from interviews with nursery teachers. The aim of the interviews was to illuminate teachers' perceptions of the teaching and learning of values in the pre-school. Foucault's social theory is regarded by commentators (Smart, 1995) as being subversively oriented towards knowledge and its utilisation by the professions. Our study draws upon some of his main concepts such as power-knowledge, surveillance, normalisation and governmentality and employs them to help explicate the interpretation of our data. At first blush a Foucauldian perspective would appear to be particularly inappropriate as applied to nursery education given the latter's association with ideals of individual freedom and self-expression, but it is suggested that greater governmentality at an official level may be eroding the orthodox discourse of educational child-centredness (Bruce,1987), It is principally maintained that, in line with Foucault's ideas, professional practice in nurseries may be understood as laying the foundations for the production of governable subjects. Three case studies constitute the field work underpinning this study, two of which were undertaken in working-class urban areas and the other in an affluent middle-class suburb. Finally it is acknowledged that the integrity of his perspective might itself be regarded as suspect, there being no obviously independent stance by which to privilege Foucault's critique over the teachers' own paradigms of socialisation. However, we claim that the importance of Foucault's ideas resides in their challenge to complacency and professional insularity.

## INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault was particularly interested in the development of individuality in the modern world and its constitution through historically situated power-relations. For Foucault, the European Enlightenment ushered in a new scientific rationality which enabled modern forms of professional and disciplinary knowledge to manage human beings by transforming them into objects of systems of knowledge. Smart (1995) comments:

> "...he is constantly interested in the social processes through which rationality is constructed and applied to the human subject, in order to make it the object of possible forms of knowledge." (p.9)

The purpose of this paper is to present a Foucauldian critical analysis of empirical data derived from interviews with nursery school teaching staff. Academics have recently highlighted the increasing desire of democratic governments in the West to enlarge the scope of legislation throughout a citizen's lifespan as a means to secure greater governmentality (Kivinen and Rinne, 1998; Goodwin, 1996). Prime Minister Blair's New Labour has developed education policies which both prescribe a curriculum for pre-school age children on a national basis, and it is also likely that staff will be subject to accountability through baseline testing of children and other comparative procedures. In Scotland there are now official curriculum guidelines for the pre-school upon which HMI will base their inspection and audit processes (Scottish Office, 1997). The individuality of the nation's children, the majority of

whom will be involved in the 'universal provision' of a nursery place for all, has now become more vulnerable to normalisation in a Foucauldian sense.

Before studying the professional discourse of child-centred educators, whom Foucault would claim are unaware of the manner in which their discursive practices are related to power-relations which control children as subjects thereby perpetuating an unjust social order (Foucault, 1977), I shall outline the relevant strands of his thought which are used later in this paper to contextualise the empirical data.

THE FOUCAULDIAN GAZE

The Foucauldian gaze can be understood as a critique of the forms of power and rationality which bind the socio-political infrastructure. The Enlightenment is treated with deep suspicion, particularly its stance concerning the role of the social sciences in securing progress. His book, Discipline and Punish (1977) explains his geneological analysis of power which he calls 'discipline'. Its main theme is an explication of the achievement of governmentality of the individual, who is subsequently socially constructed by specific regulatory techniques, namely inspection, discipline, 'normalisation' and hence governmentality. These techniques have replaced the repressive, more physically oriented violence of premodern governance. His account of the prison is simultaneously a picture of the 'micro-physics' of power and discipline located throughout modern institutions. Like Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, Foucault's genealogical analysis reveals the 'sinister', unacknowledged aspects of power in modern societies which lie hidden beneath surface appearance (Smart, 1995). The power of received discourses of knowledge based upon Enlightenment ideals is in part due to their ability to deceive us into thinking that our social practices are essentially liberating. We are encouraged by particular patterns of power relations at a given time in society to experience our socio-political structures as having essential features which could not therefore be other than they are in fact (Hall, 1992).

Modern forms of governmentality utilise measures or techniques which aim to affect the 'soul' or self-hood of persons rather than their bodies directly. So-called experts are involved with both creating and dispensing knowledge whose purpose is basically corrective. Teachers, social workers and educational psychologists, for example, represent those professions which have developed ideologies through which power as knowledge facilitates the production of 'normal', conforming individuals. Foucault argues that the rationalities underpinning professionalism are really 'political tactics' and constitute 'specific ways of knowing' which legitimate the normalisation of bodies.

Foucault's analysis of any social institution is founded upon the interrelationships between the key concepts of power, knowledge and the body. The body's visibility lends it to being easily controlled by political, economic and educational processes. Systems of socialisation ('regimes of power') require the ultimate visibility of bodies. Educational institutions are constructed as regimes whose purpose and success is predicated upon making bodies obedient and practically valuable within a particular social formation. Educational regimes, including putative 'child-centred' regimes (Walkerdine, 1986), best achieve their aims when individuals internalise their values and norms. Successful normalisation produces 'self-controlled' bodies:

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

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Power is synonymous with the multiplicity of forms of socialisation and subordination which, it must be emphasized, are coupled with social relationships based upon asymmetrical power between the parties involved.

His analysis highlights the forms and organisation of such power relations and the techniques adopted by their agents as substantive phenomena pervading modern societies. Power is regarded as a pervasive force informing the totality of social life which shapes individual behaviour by operating 'through' individuals and knowledge-systems. Both individuals and the knowledge-systems upon which they legitimate their decisions are viewed as instruments which perpetuate modern power.

Forms of power and the bodies which they embrace are interrelated through what Foucault calls 'knowledge'. The term 'knowledge' refers to the kinds of 'know-how' associated with techniques and cognitions which underpin them in the form of policies and teaching programmes. Importantly the successful exercise of power entails a knowledge of the target or object, and a grasp of its particular nature as an object. In our context this is the child and community setting. The more, for instance, that is understood about a child's motivations and social environment the more controllable that child is seen to become. The power-knowledge relation is therefore a fundamental relationship of interdependence. The social sciences whose origin is in the Enlightenment are regarded by Foucault as discourses of knowledge which are intimately implicated in power-knowledge relations and the production of governable bodies in modernity.

Training the body and normalising deviance are achieved through disciplinary techniques. For Foucault (1977) discipline is 'an art of the human body' and a method of its mastery. He refers to discipline as a 'political anatomy of detail' which operates upon individual movements and gestures until it eventually builds them into a recognisable shape. To achieve such socialisation a sophisticated form of surveillance is required which classifies deviance as belonging to the category 'abnormal' and so must be subjected to correction.

Organisational principles such as professional norms and institutional procedures foster such control; in schools timetables impose rhythms and spatio-temporal constraints through whose repetitive cycle bodies are induced into a particular social order and thus programmable for designated functions or tasks. Disciplinary methods for Foucault create the means for sanctioning which he calls 'normalisation.' These methods aim to foster conformity at a deep level of consciousness and they rely upon usually implicit normative judgements which the performance of individuals and made to comply with and against which it is assessed. Surveillance procedures may be both explicit and implicit, for instance, examinations and record keeping are respectively examples. Such procedures 'individualise' different subjects who are caught within the panoptical gaze. Their awareness of these assessment processes renders them vulnerable to self-control, and in this way his 'disciplinary society' or 'society of surveillance' is fully actualised. The knowledge that I am being examined alters how I view myself and act towards others. Examinations are key mechanisms for perpetuating the consciousness upon which modern societies operate to create and justify differentiation. The recording of data in, for example, case records or examination grades leads to an objectification of individuals who are transformed into 'cases representative of an educational category'. Foucault perceives these practices as 'forms of domination' which are increasingly used to render more powerless those individuals who already lack power and status. The social sciences constitute 'the dark side' of the Enlightenment for Foucault since, rather than being enabling of progress as Comte and others have claimed (Smith, 1998), they have instead developed as tools to legitimate inequality of power. As bodies of knowledge they are seen as being profoundly biased in their values having been maintained and developed through the power of a vested interest social formation with its own self

interests (Smart, 1985; Garland, 1991).

Such broadly characterised 'disciplinary regimes' are believed to operate beyond the law and to give rise to what Foucault calls a 'carceral archipelago'. Paralleling the materiality of disciplinary practices and their effects are specific discourses which contribute to the creation of particular kinds of thought processes which have some autonomy over the putative independent thoughts of individuals. For example, in saying that I am following child-centred educational values what may be really happening is that a discourse of education 'speaks' through me and serves to construct the very reality which it claims to be merely describing.

THE RESEARCH STUDY: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING VALUES IN NURSERIES

*Official curriculum guidelines*

By way of introduction to the case studies of practice in nurseries it is noteworthy that official government discourse about the education of preschool aged children (Scottish Office, 1997) can be seen as reverberating with Foucauldian implications and so serves to give the reader a 'flavour' of our interpretations of interviews with teaching staff. The Scottish Office in seeking to illustrate 'good practice' (and importantly to promote it by implication), provides the following documentary account of 'teaching' in the nursery:

> "A group of children was building a house with large wooden blocks. One child announced that she was building a house. Another child asked where the door was, 'because you need a door to get inside.' Someone else laughed and said, 'It's only two bricks high, you are too tall to fit inside!'" (Scottish Office, 1997, p.31).

The inculcation of the ideas of size and proportionality around which children are encouraged to 'fit' themselves trains the body in terms of socially accepted routines. The formation of the self is one which is induced through what Foucault might call 'confessionals' which render subjects more calculable and subject to corrective interventions.

The next example illustrates a seemingly innocent description of the facilitation of what Bourdieu (Jenkins,1992) refers to as 'habitus':

> "Books and pictures were provided and dressing-up clothes including hats and bags were put out for role play. Letter and card-writing material for the children to use was made available. Parents took them to visit the village post-office and buy stamps, paper, envelopes and postcards. A post-office was set up in the playroom where the children had opportunities to write their own messages and send them to each other." (Scottish Office, 1997, p.30).

Establishing the norm of self-expression in the nursery encourages others to adopt this officially legitimated discursive practice. The children 'write their own message' and thereby their 'souls' are made available to the surveillance of normalising social agents such as teachers. Linguistic practices recommended for general use in the nursery stress the need for children to 'expose' their souls to others as they should, "have opportunities to talk for a variety of purposes, for example to describe their needs and experiences... Careful listening by staff and the use of open-ended questions by staff will help children to talk with increasing confidence." Processes of recording, reporting and evaluation ensure that the availability of a child's 'confessions' are publicly available to others as part of the creation of "learning partnerships" between "children and parents."

*Research design*

Three local authority nurseries located in a Scottish town were used in the research; one of them is a nursery school, one is a nursery class based in the playground of its associated primary school, and the third is located within a church hall. Each nursery is non-denominational. Two of the nurseries are located in areas of high unemployment and would be classified as serving socio-economically deprived communities. The nursery based in the church hall serves a middle-class community with relatively low levels of unemployment.

Small area census statistics also indicated that those living in each community were overwhelmingly of Scottish origin. Staff were mainly Scottish and were all women. Fewer than one percent of the children attending these establishments belonged to ethnic minority groups.

*Methodology: Theoretical orientation*

An ethnographic approach was followed, both in the generation of data through semi-structured interviews, and in the qualitative analysis of the data. The purpose of the interviews was described to staff as being about capturing their perceptions of children learning 'values in the nursery'. Their own experiential understanding of the processes involved in the acquisition of values by children was sought. Following the ideas of Glaser and Strauss (1967) concerning 'grounded theory' we sought to identify themes which were then subject to critical examination. Staff interviews lasted about 60 minutes taking place in a quiet room in the nursery. Each was audio-taped and later transcribed for analysis. Several of Foucault's fundamental concepts are used below for the purposes of reporting the results of our data analysis. The three case studies designed using Yin (1984) took place over a period of 12 months.

FINDINGS

*(i)      Producing docile bodies*

In Foucault's book, Discipline and Punish the chapter 'Docile Bodies' is devoted to the myriad and complex ways in which a seemingly 'natural' individuality is socialised. In staff's professional practice discussed below such complexity is richly represented.

According to Smart (1985) Foucault's analysis:

> "... reveals the body as an object of knowledge and as a target for the exercise of power. The body is shown to be located in a political field, invested with power relations which render it docile and productive ... the focus is upon the diffusion of particular technologies of power and their inter-relationship with the emergence of particular forms of knowledge..." (p.76)

*(a)      Poor area nurseries*

Learning acceptable 'domestic routines' is one concern of staff.

> "They often come to nursery just out of nappies, and so they have to be trained as this is a prerequisite for getting a place. During their time here I hope to make them more aware of themselves socially and physically in the areas of toilet training and eating habits in particular."

The normalisation of deviance arising from home circumstances implies a professional 'discourse of derision' (Ball, 1990) directed against parents who staff perceive as being responsible for poor socialisation:

> "Children come in with no values about how a book should be treated, they just toss it around. A lot have speech and language problems, for example,

not one could say this was a cup and a saucer. On investigation we found parents only used mugs and plates."

Non-compliant bodies appeared to have been packed into both these nurseries:

"Many are non-cooperative, very selfish and when it comes to values if you can't get what you want you just punch, kick or bite somebody or just grab it off them."

Physical interventions by staff aim to 'squeeze out' this aggression:

"We include children not just by example, but through cuddling them, giving them a feeling of warmth and mothering through love and being tactile. Many children don't get enough touching."

Rules establish how they must use their bodies in order to play properly:

"Right from the start we have to train them to use sand and water, building materials, paints as that kind of opportunity does not in the home in most cases."

Behaviourism exploits a psychological rationale to mask its status as a tool for exercising control over others which is seen as morally acceptable compared with the physical violence used against some children in their own homes:

"Parents tell him to fend for himself, if somebody hits him he's told to hit back. Their idea of punishment for a crime is really the short, sharp smack. They find it hard to sit down and reason with the child. It's the belt and don't do that again!"

Staff teach them to 'use hands' in constructive ways:

"Our values are to stop a child behaving aggressively towards others and explain that hands are not for hurting others, but for positive things like building and sharing."

Positive reinforcement strategies are used to 'turn them' into responsible citizens:

"We only reward a good piece of behaviour and ignore the bad. If a child, for example, refused to listen to a story we'd praise those who were siting nicely and the 'ripple effect' encourages them all to seek our praise."

*(b)       Affluent area nursery*

Interestingly these staff rely heavily on institutional rules as a means of inducing governmentality; the knowledge aspect of power-relations, learning the 'how to' of socially acceptable behaviour, demands more direct cognitive engagement by these middle-class children,

"Our children are quite conscious of nice gardens and the importance of not dropping litter. They know to put their rubbish in a bag and not to trample over plants to get their ball."

Fitting in with domestic routines is perceived as coming easily to them:

"When they are baking they know they must wash their hands and not lick the spoon after they've stirred the mixture. They follow the guide book when making jelly or crisps so they know to wash hands. They know to do that at the toilet so they don't pick up germs."

Corrective discipline can be imposed through peers, and physical isolation:

> "It's seldom that we have to intervene once the rules are established; there are only five people allowed in the house and five in the brick corner. They'll say 'push-off' to a child who breaks this rule." And:

> "Sometimes you get a child who will not say he's sorry and that is a problem. What I say is 'Well you'll just have to sit on a chair until you say you're sorry."

It is important to note in passing that such professional discourses are psychologically substantive systems of representation regulating the meanings surrounding teaching practices. Foucault denies them the status of independent truth, a position which post-structuralism takes in relation to human knowledge generally (Smith,1998). The discourse of professionalism is, however, like all Foucauldian discourses independent of individuals whose cognitions it constructs and subsequently exploits to 'manufacture' children as objects of knowledge in terms of the discourse of child-centredness.

### (ii)      Confession, recording and discipline

Foucault's conception of power is associated with the many kinds of reporting which are standard practice in nurseries and can be seen as facilitative of discipline. Smart (1985) explains that for Foucault:

> "... power is not conceived as a property or possession of a dominant class, state or sovereign, but as a strategy; the effects of domination associated with power arise not from an appropriation and deployment by a subject, but from manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings' ... a relation of power does not constitute an obligation upon the 'powerless' ... it invests them, is transmitted by and through them..." (p.77)

His analysis of the 'micro-physics of power' aims to explicate how it works in terms of the techniques which Smart (1985) argues:

> "... have become embodied in local, regional, material institutions ... Analysis needs to be focused upon the way in which things work at the level of an on-going subjugation ... it circulates through the social body ... through a net-like organisation" (pp.78-79).

As a technique of power discipline relies upon the instruments of hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and the examination. Confession is an example of a 'technique of the self' through which individuals can transform their own bodies, souls and thoughts in order to 'better' conduct themselves. For Foucault these techniques are underpinned by 'obligations of truth' found in Christian societies such as our own. How do staff's discourse represent these Foucauldian claims?

### (a)      Poor area nurseries

Children are encouraged to share their subjective life with others:

> "When the children are upset we don't always know why because they haven't the vocabulary to tell us. But by the time they leave us after their year that is greatly improved."

The provision of a suitable discourse of self-revelation is an important part of educating children into 'speaking' in ways defined as open. In recent years the educational establishment has raised the profile of recording and assessment. As a potentially effective kind of domination the younger its targets are the better:

> "... We may find a child being difficult in the nursery or unusually weepy and

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there may be underlying reasons for it so we have to check carefully."

Effective governmentality of very young children entails partnerships with parents:

> "I feel records must be shared with parents. If I have to write to the Children's Panel I feel parents have the right to know what I'm saying about their child."

State governmentality becomes more effective the wider its net and so parents are included in teachers' monitoring techniques. Progress towards normalisation is also reinforced through the display of performance to parents:

> "... I put their first drawing into the folder and the latest one so that I can say to parents, "Look at the comparison. Can you see any difference?" In the majority of cases there is a dramatic improvement in a year."

Walkerdine (1986) in her critique of 'child-centred' education highlights how psychological needs, having been imputed to the child by others, are then a means of adjusting children to a putatively universally relevant curriculum process. Such a rationale is apposite to Foucault's idea of the social construction of subjects as objects of knowledge. According to staff:

> "The curriculum is adjusted to a child's needs. You are aware that he's an individual with special emotional and physical needs, especially at a crisis time."

Local authority assessment and recording policies are premised on establishing a knowledge of children's needs:

> "We assess where the child is at, the kinds of attitudes, sharing of experiences, of feelings he is ready for or not. We want to know whether he can express himself, negotiate with peers and adults. These are all hidden values and they have to be assessed to find out whether the child is capable of doing that or not."

Finally confession may be induced in children through the provision of 'therapeutic activities':

> "A very therapeutic activity is clay. How they play with it is an indicator that something is troubling them. If that comes out it is an indicator that we should be asking some questions. Conflicts in their heads may show something is happening at home."

*(b)      Affluent area nursery*

Confession in the middle-class nursery was particularly oriented towards social attitudes and interpersonal relationships. A black doll caused concern amongst staff who observed that children neglected to play with it:

> "When we got that doll initially a lot of children would not play with it. We asked them why, but I don't think they said because it was black. They just said we don't like it. We asked them why, but we didn't really get anywhere."

Children clearly resist confessing socially disapproved values which thwart educators needs to plan the education of more legitimate attitudes. The way in which children relate to other children suggests that only confessions within the social sphere are tolerated; 'whispering' escapes surveillance and has disruptive implications:

> "They were reluctant to include her, and one of them started whispering to the other one. I wasn't sure whether it was a whisper that had anything to do with her so I spoke to Gemma and said 'What was it that you were whispering to

Ann?' She told me what she had said and I felt it was reasonable to say 'It's not really nice for the person who's not hearing what your saying because they think you are saying something about them. You shouldn't really be doing that - you should share things you want to say to people."

By 'sharing' one becomes malleable to the effects of surveillance which is the subject of our final critical analysis of basic elements of professional discourse in the nursery.

### (iii) Surveillance and the learning process

The 'disciplinary gaze' is part of a hierarchy of continuous and functional surveillance geared to securing the exercise of power. Examinations generally are an integral part of the 'gaze' whereby individuals are subjected to 'normalising judgement' based upon prescriptive classificatory schemes.

Underpinned by social-scientific knowledge, which as a discourse Western rationalities defines the way in which learning is to be understood and evaluated. Reports and files on individuals mean that an individual's lifespan trajectories can be controlled ('normalised') on the basis of data about their behaviour during their early years. Smart (1985) explains Foucault's utilisation of Bentham's idea of the Panoption for conveying the power of observation:

> "The Panopticon was to function as an apparatus of power by virtue of the field of visibility in which individuals were to be located, each in their respective places ... for a centralised and unseen observer. In this schema subjects were to be individualised in their own space, to be visible, and to be conscious of their potentially constant and continuous visibility..." (p.88).

According to Foucault (1977) 'such 'visibility is a trap' and as it functions on the 'underside of law' it 'multiplies the asymmetry of power'. He argues in Discipline and Punish that surveillance is built into the teaching relationship (p.175). Support for his claims about the centrality of assessment are expressed in the official discourse of the government's curricular guidelines (Scottish Office, 1997) where an entire section deals with planning, evaluating, reporting, recording and staff interaction. Relatedly photographic techniques are employed within this document to convey what acceptable learning and assessment 'look like' in this sector. Officially sanctioned surveillance procedures include profiles, notebooks, diaries and checklists, it being stated that:

> "It is from observation and assessment of children at play that we learn how and what they learn" (Scottish Office,1997, p.45).

Traditional ideas of play as something which escapes adult scrutiny and control have been abandoned and in their place governmentality extends down into the lives of 4 year olds. Techniques of governmentality pervade the ways in which staff perceive their professional duties on the nursery floor.

### (a) Poor area nurseries

A typical view of assessment concerns its overarching character:

> "... constantly the nursery staff are observing, It is the most crucial part of the nursery work, when to observe, how to observe and for how long to observe. Learning to make observations is very much part of the training of nursery nurses and teachers attending college."

Teachers include signs of each child's progress in "little files", but such classifications of progress are not seen as productive of children as pupils:

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> "If there is a particularly good piece of play going on it would be noted in the file so that on the Parent's Consultation Day I can say 'On such and such a day your child did a very nice piece of work.' Most of our day is spent observing, we only interact with the child when the child's needs demand it. We don't impose things on the child."

Despite the belief that things are not imposed 'on the child' the results of observational assessment may inform the outcomes of surveillance:

> "We've got to know whether in fact a child uses all areas of the nursery. If a child isn't using them we ask why, and try to work out some kind of strategy to see that he completes all areas of the nursery. We would encourage the child to be somehow directed into these areas to make sure he's experiencing the whole curriculum."

Hartley (1993) also noted that staff control children's access to spaces for learning as well as the amount of time they spend within them. Governmentality also afflicts staff who are themselves required to fit their assessments into the prescribed regional profile format, a process which staff support:

> "The Profile heightens your awareness of what you are looking for in the child. It's easy to be working away and to stop thinking. I feel the Profile helps you to keep questioning your approach to the children. It gives you a complete picture of the child's development, covering everything you should be looking for in the child."

*(b)      Affluent area nursery*

Surveillance in the affluent area nursery may permit certain values such as natural justice, to be enacted upon children by other children under the legitimating gaze of staff:

> "In one case a wee girl told me that somebody had hit her and she's got quite a temper herself. I told her that I thought it was an accident and said that he didn't mean it. Then we watched and noticed that she felt that I hadn't dealt with the incident adequately; she went across to him and lashed out. He accepted it and walked away and that was the end of it."

On other occasions sociological observations by staff about local families may alter their approach to the wider curriculum, but not deeper values concerned with fitting children into a culturally situated landscape:

> "We did take the children to Safeways shopping, but gave it up because it wasn't an experience that children were deprived of. There are lots of things like that that we don't do because the parents do it."

Surveillance can also prompt the need to compel children into being less selfish and to show empathy. Producing the appropriate emotional attitude involves staff in seeking 'confessions' from children and participating in the discourse of reason:

> "When we observe unacceptable behaviour we take them aside and speak to them. We say 'Would you like that done to you?' Let's say it was someone who had hit someone very hard. They'll answer 'no' so then we ask 'Well why did you do that?' Sometimes there is a reason, maybe they are retaliating because the other person has done something to them."

According to Smart (1985) Foucault's account of "the diffusion of disciplinary technologies of power" (p.137) alerts us to how, as in the example just mentioned, individuals can themselves be made subjects through engagement with specific

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discourses. In this case the teacher as 'investigator' assumes a privileged access to the 'truth' and that the knowledge gained is unrelated to relations of power with the children.

DISCUSSION

Berger and Luckman (1991) in their sociological treatise about the social construction of reality raise the question of what the reality of everyday life means. In the current paper the Foucauldian theoretical perspective has been 'set against' the apparently common sense perspective of nursery teachers. While part of our enterprise in this paper is to highlight the contested nature of staff's interpretations of practice it is also our aim to suggest that any professional practice is a contingent matter which is vulnerable to a multiplicity of competing interpretations. The theoretical perspective which we bring to bear upon social life influences the meanings that it has for us both as participants and as social scientists (Smith,1998). According to Berger and Luckman (1991):

> "The language used in everyday life continuously provides me with the necessary objectification and posits the order within which these make sense and within which everyday life has meaning for me ... The reality of life is taken for granted as reality ..." (pp.35-37).

The main argument of this paper can be seen as endorsing the social constructivist thesis in so far as it may be regarded as raising the question about whether nursery practice creates 'docile bodies' as opposed to socialisation of an innocent kind. The construction of professional practice in terms of staff's own accounts and our Foucauldian critique of them raises the question concerning which there can be no definitive answer regarding their relative validities.

Adopting the view that truth is essentially perspective-driven rather than a thing hanging free from presuppositions leads to the conclusion that one virtue of a Foucauldian critique is to educate professional self-consciousness. The possibility that the socialisation officially provided to children by the state may be less than liberational can contribute to greater professional self-awareness, a realisation that one's cherished values may be achieving ends which are anathema to one's ideals. The normalisation processes which Foucault argues inform the real basis of schooling may create a sense of disillusionment within the teaching profession about what being an educator means, and whether to include such sociological critiques in courses for teachers may remain an issue partly for that reason (O'Hear, 1988; Lawlor, 1990; Holligan, 1997). Nevertheless the important point is that by a better understanding of the complexities informing decisions about how we socialise children we can improve the intellectual and dispositional quality of professionalism.

Moreover, through the very act of raising these issues Foucault also alerts one to wider attempts by governments to exercise control over its citizens. In relation to this broader political landscape it is noteworthy that an media report ('The Independent', 2.4.98) claimed that New Labour was exploring the idea of an electronic CV for citizens giving them numbers "from the cradle to the grave" (see Lyon, 1998 on cyberspace surveillance). Such developments may facilitate the production of levels of conformity in the population which are contrary to the explicit democratic ideals concerning the need for citizens to be critically aware. Walzer (1991) comments on the political implications of Foucault's social theory are apposite here as they explain how, through extra-legal means, individuals may be normalised:

> "The crucial point of Foucault's political theory is that discipline escapes the world of law and right - and then begins to 'colonise' that world, replacing legal principles of physical, psychological and moral normality ..."(p.59).

Although our accounts of staff's explanations of how they teach values can be construed in terms of a Foucauldian gaze it is important to at least acknowledge the possibility that such a gaze may be no more or less robust than those which it has been used to deconstruct. Even an apparent arbitrariness surrounding our intellectual and professional accounts may, paradoxically foster a different sense of autonomy among members of the teaching profession. Normally autonomy is exercised from within a specific discourse such as child-centredness, but if the 'truth effects' which Foucault attributes to professional discourses function to create pliant individuals, then teachers and others involved in education who wish to maintain their intellectual integrity ought to look critically at the potentially constraining effects of any discourse on the socialisation of children.

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