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USING FOUCAULT'S METHODS

Gavin Kendall
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can actually present his or her own work in the name of his or her own processes of development.

The test, then, is only one among many procedures schools have in their battery for developing the child. Another crucial technique, certainly in the schools studied by our project, is the additional language teaching given to children of ethnic minority parentage, under Section 11 of the 1966 British Local Government Act. Under the terms of this Act, Local Education Authorities may receive money for the employment of extra staff if they have to 'make special provision in the exercise of any of their functions in consequence of the presence within their areas of substantial numbers of immigrants from the Commonwealth whose language or customs differ from those of the rest of the community' (Home Office 1986).

Such interventions into the lives of children are, of course, easily criticised as manifestations of 'racist ideology', an attempt to substitute white bourgeois language and values for those of another ethnic group. But to approach these interventions in such a way is to miss an important point. The influence of 'race' has been inscribed in a particular way. In the schools studied, the child has to have both parents born in a foreign country (not just the Commonwealth) to be targeted for extra education. Once inscribed, 'race' is put into play in a series of calculations about the child. The potential dangers of something like Section 11 are obvious to the teachers and the schools; as one school handbook describes good practice, just after a piece on Section 11 and Remedial Education (which are, incidentally, strongly distinguished):

This includes communication across the curriculum – the acquiring and passing on of knowledge, value [*sic*], beliefs and ideas. The children will learn as much from how we teach them as they do about what we teach them. We must ensure that opinions, beliefs and other value judgements are taught as such. We must avoid using methods or materials that may discriminate either openly or subconsciously and be able to justify everything we do.

All of this is to suggest that a Foucaultian analysis should not understand the sorts of practices put into play in the classroom as negative or as obstacles to complete development. The school is a factory–laboratory where children are manufactured out of educational experiments. The intention is not to deny children access to the truth about themselves, but to produce them as functioning, maximised citizens, to produce the truth about themselves. Culture actively works at producing citizens by management; it is not merely a repository of meanings.

Ms Williamson makes it quite clear that she understands the costs and gains of teaching children to read:

I mean, to a certain extent, I suppose you're um ... constantly urging the children to conform, but then in any institution you can only get by, in a sense, by,

other hand, you're training them to take their part in society, so in that sense perhaps it's not negative, it's positive. I suppose it depends on where you're standing and how you're looking at it.

Techniques like those encouraged by Section 11 may well have a negative effect on children's consciousness of their own racial identity, but that is not the point of such measures. As Ms Williamson eloquently puts it, the point is 'training them to take their part in society'.

Summary: cultural studies as studies of meaning versus cultural studies as studies of management

Cultural studies as studies of meaning

- Use Foucault's methods like wall-filler products that promise certain results if you just 'aim and squirt', at whatever surface you care to pick.
- Use Foucault's methods to search the 'deep' water for 'deep' meaning, that is, use them as simply another resource in the study of culture as the site where hegemonic and resistant meanings ritually (and endlessly) do battle (for Hall, Foucault can thus help us confirm that '[n]o social practice exists outside of the domain of the semiotic – the practices and production of meaning').
- Use Foucault's methods but convert Foucault's understanding of power into only a synonym for membership of the board of the Culture Meaning-Bank – the powerful help stock the bank with those meanings which suit them, the powerless have no choice but to withdraw these meanings and eventually come to accept them as their own.
- Use Foucault's methods but forget that Foucault's books are specific histories of specific objects, not recipes for those interested in (half-) baking accounts of the meaning of modern life.

Cultural studies as studies of management

- Use Foucault's methods to produce accounts of particular cultural practices, such as schooling, which deliberately avoid reducing the complexity of historical change to simple stories of cause and effect and avoid exaggerating the importance of a set of local and contingent events by giving them an overarching logic or meaning.
- Use Foucault's methods to present culture as a set of governmental practices aimed at producing certain sorts of persons, not as a collection of phenomena which hold meanings like a bank, from which people withdraw and into which they deposit.
- Use Foucault's methods to help see cultural objects as ragbags of knowledge, practices and programmes gradually put together, with new practices being invented and old practices revitalised and pressed

- Use Foucault's methods to help understand culture in terms of the management of lives, not the meanings they drew on or left aside.
- Use Foucault's methods to help track forms of self, modes of ethical comportment, ways of knowing and of disciplining as products of particular cultural apparatuses, like the classroom, rather than pre-existing entities, thus helping to demonstrate that culture produces persons; it does not operate with and/or for pre-aculturated individuals. This 'culture' is not the site where individuals are imperfectly liberated, but rather the environment where persons are positively constructed within specific institutional forms, an arena which is productive of specific, historically localised forms of subjectivity, not a site for fostering a priori rational individuals, or a site for the repression and denial of true individuality.
- Use Foucault's methods to give a rather 'flat' description of the historical events involved in accounting for culture, because they deliberately eschew recourse to 'deeper' explanations of particular apparatuses or deeper meanings of the self. The cultural actor featured in this Foucaultian approach is thus not a bastardised or bowdlerised version of the 'true' self, a betrayal of what could have been and an obstacle to what should be – some artefact of 'genuine' culture.
- Use Foucault's methods to present the transmission of culture through schooling as a fragile practice, so contingent that it is hard to pick out an overarching logic or state-inspired programme, for example.
- Use Foucault's methods to help understand the classroom as a place for the constitution of young, autonomous citizens – an instance of the classroom as factory (there is an obvious 'product') and as laboratory (a series of experiments have been instituted to help this productive process).
- Use Foucault's methods to help show that ideas about 'naturalness' are inserted into the logic of the cultural institutions almost at the level of common sense. From our Foucaultian perspective, such 'naturalness' is always the result of a very specific historical conjuncture.
- Use Foucault's methods to help explore the ways the practitioners involved in the regular operation of cultural institutions *manage as best they can*, including the way different theories about how to proceed become 'black-boxed' – in Latourian terminology, the way they become common sense and amalgamated into what appears to be a coherent practice.
- Use Foucault's methods in a manner that allows us to see clearly a vision of what the schoolroom might produce as a part of culture-as-management (or culture-as-government, or culture-as-administration) – what actors, what objects, and what ideas.
- Use Foucault's methods to help build a picture of culture-as-administration in which being 'made free' and 'choosing' are treated seriously as techniques of liberal governance, rather than being seen as tricks to hide some deeper agenda.

- Use Foucault's methods to aid an understanding of the examination and the mark in terms of the production of a new sort of knowledge about the child through a specific means of 'capturing' the child in an inscription. This is not the operation of a negative power – the examination is a technique of normalisation, but it is a normalising technique which has the amplification of capacities built into it as a *raison d'être*.
- Use Foucault's methods in an account of culture that does not understand the sorts of practices put into play in the classroom as negative or as obstacles to complete development – the school is a factory – laboratory where children are manufactured out of educational experiments. The intention is not to deny children access to the truth about themselves, but to produce them as functioning, maximised citizens – to produce the truth about themselves, by this account, culture actively works at producing citizens by management.

It's your turn to try to use these points in the following exercise.

EXERCISE 5.3

Go through the various excerpts from the interviews with teachers and pupils included thus far and see if you can spot exactly where our analyses of them differ from the sort of analyses produced by the culture-as-meaning approach to cultural studies. Please consider at least three sets of pupils' and teachers' talk. Please write about 1,000 words in tackling this task.

A few more remarks

In establishing the advantages of an approach to culture which uses Foucault's methods to focus on management, or administration, rather than consciousness and meaning, we have concentrated on schooling as a part of culture (in the way we want you to see culture). We have dealt with some of the tactics of the modern classroom in relation to the teaching of reading, as a micro-example of culture at work. There are few spaces outside these practices where the child can refuse to be produced as a full-filled citizen, armed with literacy and other techniques for living a particular sort of life. However, we do not want to suggest that there is no resistance. Perhaps it would be appropriate to include in this concluding section an anecdote about such forms of resistance.

Late in the school afternoon at one of the schools in our study the children have a playtime. When they come back after play they have a story. Then, for the last fifteen minutes of the school day, they finish off what they were doing before play. When they have finished their work they can 'choose', that is, select an activity such as a game to fill the rest of the time. One child Michael in the period leading up to play worked laboriously