Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and Early Childhood Education: Tools for Understanding Inequity and The Pursuit of Social Justice

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Summary

Formal early childhood education is a relatively *modern* institution to which increasing numbers of children are routinely exposed. Since the modern invention of childhood, the early childhood years have been increasingly established as a site for public and private investment in the name of individual and community development, the achievement of educational success, increased human productivity, and ultimately labour market productivity and excellence. As various forms of early childhood education have developed around the world, each has been imbued with values, perspectives, norms, and standards of its pioneers. They have also drawn upon and reinforced certain truths, knowledges, practices, and expectations about children, childhood, education and society. As microcosms of society whose inhabitants are largely novice members of the communities of which they are part, teachers in early childhood education are routinely addressing issues of exclusion, injustice, and inequity with children and families. This article illustrates how such issues manifest in knowledge and practice within the early years by drawing upon education research that engages with the methods and tools of French historian and poststructural philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984).

Foucault's interests in the nexus of power-knowledge-truth and its consequences for life, offers avenues for comprehending how modern institutions, such as systems of early childhood education, invest in and bring about certain forms of knowledge and practice. His

methods of genealogical inquiry and discourse analysis make visible the workings of power as it moves on, in, and through human bodies. The perspectives made visible by Foucauldian analyses show how techniques, developed and applied within institutions, form humans in particular ways. Thus it is possible to see the interplay between power-truth-knowledge, how things come to be, and how they may change.

Keywords: Early childhood education, Foucault, Discourse Analysis, Genealogy, Power/Knowledge/Truth Nexus, Poststructuralism, Regime of Truth, Disciplinary Power, Subject Position, Social Justice.

Introduction

The nationwide provision of organised and formal early childhood education services is a relatively *modern* institution in the social order of many *Minority World* countries. While the provision of daily care for children outside of the home is a long-established practice, albeit with sometimes disastrous outcomes as several historical and notorious cases of *baby-farming* in the Victorian era proved (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2012), the group care of children in their before-school years, concurrent with concern for their learning and

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1   The term Minority World reflects a rejection of the categorisation of world countries according to the binary of developed/developing (or first/third world). In recognising such resistance at the start of this article, I draw attention to its principal concern: the workings of power within language and social life. Binary thinking reflects power relations (Gunn, 2015). In this case it is recognised that the so-called *developed* world (the ascendant term in the binary configuration) has historically held sway over conceptualisations and priorities for the so-called *developing* world (countries traditionally referred to as 'third world' or 'under developed'), but by taking up the terms majority/minority and inverting these in the binary configuration, the power relation is both underscored and troubled. This turn towards Minority / Majority World discourses has been effected over a number of years within sociology, critical social anthropology, and early childhood studies (see for example, Hart, 2006; MacNaughton, 2005; Tisdall and Punch, 2012).

development as part of the broader education system represents a modern shift in thinking about children, childhood, public-private responsibility for childrearing, and education systems. Across the twentieth century the early childhood years have become established as a site for public and private investment as the institutionalisation of children and childhood, in the interests of learning and ultimately human productivity, has taken hold.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a French historian and poststructural philosopher whose interests in the power-knowledge-truth nexus and its consequences for social and political life offers many avenues for understanding the potential and consequences of modern institutions. Foucault (1983a) claimed we must understand the historical conditions upon which current knowledge and truth is based if we are to comprehend the workings of power in contemporary social life. He studied prisons and hospitals, issues of insanity, illness, sexuality, and more, demonstrating how in the modern era, humans have become an increasing object of scientific inquiry to be improved, normalized, predicted and known. Foucault's work demonstrates how the truths produced of people change in a given historical period, relative to a society's dominant beliefs, discourses, and methods of scientific inquiry. His unique approach to studying the historical, known as genealogy, is both method and product (Foucault, 1977). Genealogies make visible what Foucault described as the mutual constitution of knowledge-power and can reveal how particular truths and senses of normal become established, sustained, and imposed in particular disciplinary fields and on social life. Foucault's tools offer many entry points for inquiry. They also remind us, through a kind of "pessimistic activism" (Foucault, 1983b, p.232) that things, such as they are right now, could be different.

This article considers the deployment of Foucault's tools of inquiry within research in the field of organised early childhood education. Genealogies of childhood, education, and various aspects of early childhood education have revealed how technologies, constituted through discourses, are used to subject people to certain practices (imposed by the self and others), bring a certain order to social life, and to produce the self in forms that are recognisable and ultimately productive. Starting with the notion of genealogy, I will discuss major concepts of *discourse and subject position, power, regime of truth and discipline* drawing on studies whose authors' have engaged with these concepts as they have conducted research in the field of early childhood education. The article is a selective account of what I perceive of as some major affordances of Foucault's work for understanding the workings of power-knowledge-truth in modern day institutions – especially early childhood education. Using early childhood education as a site of inquiry I show how researchers have used Foucault's work to make visible the constructed nature of organised early childhood education as a modern institution and apparatus, its tenets, and its effects. Through discussion I will draw attention to the utility of Foucault's work for studying and comprehending the critical early childhood education concerns of the pursuit of equity and social justice with and for children. As I write from the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, (hereafter A/NZ), the examples and studies I draw from in this article arise from mostly the Australasian context where Foucault's reach has been obvious for a number of years. Furthermore, my own examples of practice arise from my own professional histories as early childhood teacher and university academic.

Foucault's Genealogies: Insights into the Modern Institution of Early Childhood Education

Foucault described genealogy as:

…a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is transcendental in relation to the field of events... (1977, p.117). As method, genealogy asks us to analyse discourses in order to "re-think or un-think the categories and procedures through which we know and account for experience and identity" (Dehli, 2003, pp.136-137). We can use genealogy to figure how the particular knowledge and truth produced within a discipline and its institutions may authorize the exercising of certain forms of power. For example, in the context of early childhood education one historically dominant way the *child* has been known has been through developmental psychology discourses. Therein the whole child is constituted as the sum of various developmental domains and the task of the early childhood teacher is to observe, support, and promote these in their work. In the United States, a developmental approach to early childhood education was published in the late 1980s by the *National Association for the Education of Young Children* as a set of guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education (Bredekamp & NAEYC, 1987). The approach found its way to A/NZ and elsewhere and developmental discourses could be observed in and around practice in early childhood education. For example, regulations for A/NZ early childhood education directed teachers at the time, to provide a "range of developmentally appropriate activities, that cater for the needs of the children, fostering their physical, emotional, social, cultural, creative, and cognitive development…" (Education (early childhood centres) Regulations, 1990, s.34.a). For me as a teacher at the time, and for programme planning purposes, this meant I sought to know children in terms of various stages of development so I could identify their stage/level, plan for, and progress it. I would draw from other fields and sources, also informed through developmental discourses

to justify and confirm my practice. For instance, if I were considering arts curriculum and children's 'creative development', I might observe children's play and artistry at drawing and painting activities, making particular judgements about ability, based on for instance Lowenfeld's (1947) theory around drawing stages in early childhood. The assessment, based upon the evidence I'd accumulated and interpreted, would justify decisions I then made about how best to arrange the early childhood programme in order to match children's developmental stage, allowing them to solidify and eventually, when ready, exceed it. Through developmental discourses and the authority invested in me as *teacher*, I was able to take up particular observation and documentation practices, compare and judge individual children's abilities against normative measures of development, and to make pedagogical decisions about what children supposedly needed as I assisted them to acquire and perform a so-called normal trajectory of creative development. By drawing upon Foucault's genealogy to trace the movement of discourses like this it is possible to understand how and why certain people and practices come to be, how certain understandings, knowledge, and truth are reinforced, and also how they may change.

Around the same time as I was teaching in early childhood education a major critique of developmental psychology and its normative effects within early childhood education was growing in NZ and elsewhere (see for example Fleer's 1995, *DapCentrism: Challenging Developmentally Appropriate Practice*). New Zealanders were themselves also investing in the writing of a landmark early childhood curriculum policy *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) which, in its final form and over time privileged a turn towards cultural psychology, the cultural nature of human development, and a growing interest in the very young child as a subject of education. A shift to more educationally based discourses

underpinning A/NZ early childhood education was supported by subtle yet significant

changes within the early childhood regulations in 1998. A revision there now directed

teachers to "enhance children's <u>learning</u> and development through planning… cater for the

<u>learning</u> and developmental needs of children…" [my emphasis] (Education (early childhood

centres) Regulations, 1998, s.32.a) as a view of the child as more than the sum of

developmental domains came into view. Now early childhood teachers would focus on the

production and support of a new subject within early childhood education: *child learner,*

whose reification would in turn positively support developmental growth and change. A

whole raft of new technologies and practices, related to assessment for learning emerged (see

for example the Ministry of Education published assessment exemplars, *Kei Tua O Te Pae*

Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars, 2004/2009, and the 2009, *Te Whatu*

Pōkeka Kaupapa Māori Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars) and teacher

and child subjectivities in early childhood education expanded with them. Now in every day

practice within A/NZ early childhood education it is routine to see teachers, children, and

parents conversing about learning, documenting learning, and planning for the same. The

subject of child *learner* has become well and truly central to the early childhood education

practice and to the education system overall. An account and critique of this discursive shift

is given in Ballard's (2004) article, about A/NZ education, learners, and outcomes, where he

considers A/NZs neoliberal and market-driven model of State education asking the question:

where did all the children go?

In reference to Foucault's genealogies, Tamboukou (1999) argues that they show how we

must separate ourselves from the "contingency that has made us what we are" (p. 203) if we

are to observe how certain subject positions are offered up in a particular domain (teacher

observer, child learner for instance) and understand the norms/expectations about how they will relate. Furthermore, it is possible to see through genealogical analyses how knowledge and power work together to produce *disciplined* and *docile* bodies (Foucault, 1995), how *norms* (and truths) become established, and how certain *power relations* are supported and perpetuated within a social sphere. Thus, the strength of genealogy as method for understanding the ways in which human endeavor has produced, accumulated, and wielded knowledge-power-truth becomes apparent. With a Foucauldian lens in play we can begin to appreciate how those authorised to speak within a given domain may become entwined with and dependent upon certain truths and forms of knowledge, which when imposed upon others may lead to institutional inequality and injustice.

Foucault's Discourses: An Early Childhood Education Example

Discourse analysis for Foucault (1969, 1978) provides a means of showing how social and political hierarchies are produced and sustained within the fields of knowledge in which they operate. Discourses operate across as well as within specific disciplinary traditions (education, medicine, the law for instance), to convey knowledge and shape associated clinical and professional practices. In an article on heteronormative discourses and early childhood education (Gunn, 2011), I discussed how my own formal understandings of sexuality development emerged for instance informed by knowledge from domains of medicine, developmental psychology, and psychiatry, to produce and reinforce what I argued is the statement of heteronormative discourse: 'heterosexual sexuality is/as normal'. With such an understanding shaping thoughts and beliefs, the surveillance of children's sexuality development, along a particular trajectory that predicted normal adult heterosexual sexuality could be effected in practice, so that when, for instance, parents came to early childhood

teachers to discuss how worried they were about their boy's dressing up behaviour (in so-called female clothing) they were able to be assured that it was 'just play' and a stage that would inevitably pass (see Gunn and MacNaughton, 2007, for a discussion of what I perceived are problems associated with this). The point is, within early childhood education, developmental psychology, educational, and pedagogical discourses for instance, converge to support normative thinking and practices that teachers and managers of early childhood services may then use to conduct their work.

A further example is the practice of aged based segregation of children. Thus, depending on a person's chronological age and related discursively produced assumptions about independence, autonomy, cognitive, verbal, and physical capacities et cetera, fewer or more teachers may be employed, the size of the child group may change, the nature of the curriculum, available toys and equipment, and associated teaching strategies may differ. The developmental discourses, taken up in rules and regulations set by Government, are used by mangers to make decisions about staffing schedules, the available space for child play, the ratio of teachers to children et cetera; architects draw upon developmental discourses when designing the space and built environmental conditions within which children and their teachers will be housed; the discourses produce certain truths about children and their capacities across the lifespan; they establish expectations held by teachers, parents and children themselves about what it may be possible to do and not do in a certain early childhood setting, with a particular child or group of children, at a given time.

In another illustration, Radford's (2015) PhD study noted children's sense of safety for themselves in an outdoor space of their early childhood setting was contingent upon the children knowing they were being watched over by teachers. Arguing that children's

requests to be 'looked after' were examples of Foucault's *biopower* (1978, p.143) inserting itself into the psyche of the child, the requests exemplified how children may come to govern themselves in early childhood settings through discourses of helplessness, childhood, and safety. In this they mobilized a construction of themselves as powerless and in need of protection from a potentially hostile play environment – an understanding that simultaneously constructs teachers as contingent with a safe and caring environment – by virtue of just being in it. Children thus became sensitised to being required to manage their behaviour in the early childhood setting, part of which included being under constant surveillance. Consequently they readily became self-censoring subjects with docile bodies. We can see here how discourses both afford subjects a certain kind of treatment and delineate the boundaries of what's constituted as appropriate practice: needing to be supervised and the impossibility of children playing outside alone. The discourses "carry with them norms for behaviour, standards of what counts as desirable and undesirable, proper and improper" (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon, 2002, p.82). The Radford (2015) example shows how even so-called 'free play' in the early childhood outdoor environment is everything but free and only ever intelligible through discursive regulation and deployment or certain people (subjects) and things. Thus, researchers can use Foucauldian discourse analysis to help understand the conditions that have led to certain practices in a field like early childhood education, and to question their effects – which regularly raises issues of inequity and injustice.

Doing Discourse Analysis

In practice, the *doing* of discourse analysis in Foucault's terms has many entry points. One may work to identify what is taken as true (and by association therefore, false) within a given

discourse and associated acceptable forms of truth production (data gathering) and evidence; one may observe what is constituted within discourse as normal and deviant, inquiring into how the means of making such classifications come to be; it may be possible to examine what Foucault called the "library or documentary field" (1969, p.57) within a discipline and to see what truths it speaks and which forms of power-knowledge it upholds. Through each of these entry points the inquirer may be able to discern how particular subjects (see below) are constituted, their *fields of power relations*, and how particular discourses bring about certain socio-political effects.

Discourses are described by Burr (1995) as containing "slots" (p.141) (subject positions) that provide us (people/subjects) with ways of representing ourselves and others. A limited number of subject positions are available in any given discourse and each position has consequences for how one is perceived by others, and perceives the self. Together, subject positions exist within fields of power relations which are established and substantiated by discourses. These determine who can speak, with what kinds of authority, and to which topics. In my own doctoral study of heteronormative discourses and early childhood education for instance (Gunn, 2008), I argued that heteronormative discourses constituted the subject position of 'parent' to be a biologically or legally related (female) mother or (male) father of a child. Within this dominant construction, others who parent children may be constituted as not-real-parents, other, and treated differently. My theory was proved time and time again as teachers and same-gender parents of children spoke about experiences of exclusion, times when they were misconstrued as people of a different kind (grandmother, aunt for instance), or simply ignored. The reality of non-biological, non-legally constituted, same-gender parents had become *subjugated knowledge* (Foucault, 1980, p.81) – the

unsayable within heteronormative discourse. The study showed how the subject position of *parent* was interpreted and occupied by unauthorized experts, such as lesbians and gay men, as they asserted their parenting rights and responsibilities in early childhood education and the consequences of this. It also showed how the subject position of parent (as someone legally or biologically related to a child) was constituted and defended as people evoked heteronormative discourses to defend practices that excluded or were interpretable as unfair or unjust. An example produced in the study illustrated some teachers' reticence about sharing information regarding children's learning with same-gendered non-biological parents on the grounds that they weren't related to the child and therefore had no right to access such information. Thus, the study opened up spaces for working against the normative and exclusionary effects of heteronormative discourse in pursuit of a more socially just and inclusive practice of early childhood education.

Tesar's (2014) study on educational resources for use in early years settings provides an example of the workings of Foucault's *field of power relations* demonstrating the diffuse, distributed, and mobile nature of power as it moves through and across related fields or disciplines. Focusing on the workings of neoliberal discourse and the production of the A/NZ child and childhoods as "happy [and] uncomplicated"(p.860), Tesar analysed a set of NZ Government sponsored educational resource books called 'My Feelings' – a series designed to support teachers in their early childhood education work with children to recognise and respond positively to everyday feelings and emotions. The analysis explores relationships between book authors' self-censorship, potential classification decisions about book themes and content by Government bodies, and desired teacher practices in early childhood education – all conflating to inscribe on the child and teacher body, certain

behaviours and acceptable child subjectivities. A close reading of the texts showed how they present "the official, desired outcomes of neoliberal childhoods and how children should think about their feelings" (p.868). The capillary nature of power (Foucault, 1980, p.39) imbued in discourse is evident here. Tesar's study shows how these consistent, subtle and continuous messages reach into the early childhood setting from contexts far beyond, to shape ideas about what children and teachers should think, say and do.

Observing the Workings and Effects of Power in Early Childhood Education

Foucault's motives for making power an object of his research about hospitals and prisons were explored in an interview (1988) when he explained he was trying to address the question "at the centre of everything…: what is power? And, to be more specific: how is it exercised, what exactly happens when someone exercises power over another?" (p.101-102). A useful account of Foucault's major propositions on power are given in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) where he explained for instance that power was neither entirely sovereign nor exclusively repressive, not only held by individuals to be wielded over others, nor able to be exercised without resistance. Rather he characterised power as emerging from, and through, the general social body (allowing simultaneous exercising of power *on* as well as *from* or *through* it); as operating within institutions, families, groups; as relational and productive. He illustrated his position with an account of the production of sexuality in the Victorian and modern eras, making the point that power-knowledge-truth were to be viewed as interdependent.

Tackling the issue of power in the field of early childhood studies, MacNaughton's (2005) landmark book about poststructural activism in pursuit of equity and social justice considers

the power-knowledge-truth nexus, including importantly how what Foucault termed *regimes of truth* (1980, p.112) come to be established and applied. MacNaughton explains the way developmental discourses act as a truth regime systematising how we think, act, and feel about children in the early years. Foucault (1978) explained that power is relational, and also that within a disciplinary regime it may be descending (Foucault, 1995) as it works to make the person upon whom the power is exercised more individualized; recall the image of child as the sum of developmental domains introduced earlier and the expectations established in regulations about assessing and progressing children's development along specified lines. Foucault says that in such a system of discipline, "the child is more individualized than the adult, the patient more than the healthy man [*sic*], the madman and the delinquent more than the normal and the non-delinquent…" (p.193). He continues, explaining how one becomes differentiated from so-called normal subjects within the workings of the a disciplinary system, "…when one wishes to individualize the healthy, normal and law-abiding adult, it is always by asking him [*sic*] how much of the child he has in him, what secret madness lies within him, what fundamental crime he has dreamt of committing" (p.193). Armed with such knowledge authorities can make decisions about others, such as whether to apply corrective measures or techniques designed to govern the body and subject in so-called/thought normal directions, as in my example earlier of supporting children in early childhood education towards a normal trajectory of creative development shows.

Millei & Cliff's (2014) article about the preschool bathroom architecture in an Australian early childhood setting points to the constitution and regulation of children's bodies through discursively produced regimes of truth. The analysis also includes evidence of how children's bodies may be produced as problematic, revealing consequences of this, for

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example, in an eventual exercising of teacher's sovereign power over a child – a practice that worked in active contravention of other declared dominant discourses of democracy and child rights in the teacher's work. The study considered the ways bathrooms operate as civilizing spaces "where children are 'taught' to regulate and fashion their bodies, and to shape their conduct to fit the norms" (2014, p. 245). While questioning the totalising effects of the knowledge-power-truth nexus and its reach upon all children at all times, theirs' is a persuasive argument about how children's bodies are established as targets for disciplinary power, how bathroom spaces in early childhood settings may act to regularize children, how some children are able to disrupt and avoid regulation, and how bathrooms teach children to regulate both their bodies and their conduct in particular ways, even when teachers aren't there.

Discipline, Disciplinary Power and Bodily Regulation in Early Childhood Education

Foucault's use of the term *discipline* was entwined with notions of *power regime* and *disciplinary power*. The term discipline is used in two different yet related ways in Foucault's work and both are useful for research inquiries that are examining conditions for the pursuit of equity and social justice. First, discipline as noun, refers to the field or a scope of practice - institutional sites from which subjects make their discourse and from which discourse derives its objects, norms, evidence et cetera (Foucault, 1969). The law for instance, psychiatry, or in this case, early childhood education can be considered, disciplines. In this sense the term demarcates boundaries of expertise and provides lines of intersection with other disciplines thus facilitating the capillary flow of power-knowledge-truth in and through socio-political-institutional life. The production of early childhood education as a modern institution and apparatus represents a new discipline within education in A/NZ, for

instance. With its emergence, the field has become increasingly reified in the present milieu of educational, social, employment, and political initiatives working to improve A/NZ citizens' educational and economic prosperity and growth. Formal early childhood education has led to new types of education subjectivities, expectations about coordinated public-private investment in individuals and childhoods, new forms of practice, career pathways, evidence, language, architecture and the like, all differentiating and working to produce, sustain, and improve the subjects of our enterprise (early childhood teachers, child learners, working parent consumers et cetera). Discipline however is also much more about the micro-politics of power for Foucault, and here we see how the term is used to comprehend how bodies, and the subjectivities they are required to perform, get produced as docile through discourse, techniques, and the workings of knowledge-power-truth.

In Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1995), the question of how human bodies become disciplined along particular lines is addressed through major concepts of docility, corrective training and surveillance. Application of these techniques within modern institutions works to enter the body into "a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it… [thus producing] subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies" (p.138). Addressing the way discipline necessitates the production of certain forms of differentiation, including locations, for example, early childhood settings and schools, factories, and prisons; and how these work to contain different sorts of people and distribute them (children, workers, prisoners for instance); categorise them relative to each other (such as into age-segregated groupings of so-called 'under and over twos' in the A/NZ early childhood context); and require certain things of them: be at this place, at this time, in this way (at school, between the hours of 9am-3pm, sitting compliantly in class), the concept of discipline is brought right

down to the embodied and individual / collective human and social sphere where we can see how power infuses and moves bodies for particular means, in particular ways.

Blaise's (2005) summary of her study into children's 'doing' of gender in the early childhood classroom provides much evidence of this disciplinary power and bodily regulation amongst young children. Focusing on gender discourses and children's performances of 'girl' and 'boy', Blaise shows not only how discourses that are taken up by children are used by them to modify or perfect their own bodily representations but how children use these to encourage others to do the same. Blaise explains a dominant discourse of being a "girly girl" (p.93) that became evident in her study, noting how the discourse was manifest in the understanding that girls should wear clothes of a certain style (frilly, pink, matching shoes, ribbons et cetera) and maintain a neat appearance. Self-surveillance and the imposition of an expectation that the requisite performance of 'girly girl' was to be shared by others too was observed through repeated instances of children checking on their presentation in a mirror and discussing with others "how hard it was to stay neat and clean throughout the school day" (p.93). Blaise overheard a girl telling another, after she'd become messy at an activity in the play space, "I got real messy. Don't go there, especially if you want your clothes to stay pretty" (p.93). Using Foucault to understand such events, we can explain this type of behaviour as examples of power inserting itself into the body through the take up of particular discourses and concomitant norms, standards, and truths (about how to be girl in the example here). Blaise's study illustrates the productive forces of power as it moves bodies in particular ways – which was a key project of Foucault's work. When regulated and produced in the manner demanded by a dominant discourse, the subject is understood to become *docile* as it gives way to the workings of biopower. Armed with knowledge of how to be 'girly girl' the

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children in Blaise's study were able to require of others and themselves, a particular bodily appearance if they were to be considered normal (in the girly girl discourse). Thus, we can see complex and multiple ways power may be wielded in children's worlds; and as teachers we can therefore work to intervene.

So Why, and How, Foucault in Studies of Early Childhood Education?

A final impromptu question put to me at my doctoral viva defense about heteronormative discourses and early childhood education was asked by one of my supervisors as the meeting was coming to an end. She asked: so why Foucault? What does he have to offer early childhood education? I had never consciously considered the question but my response was instantaneous and resolute: "he was an optimist" I replied, "although the work is so dense, it might be difficult to believe." I went on to explain how I considered his work useful for figuring out not only how certain things come to be, but also its utility for demonstrating that things don't always stay as they are. When we recognise the circulatory nature of power, the way discourses construct social life, and how these things shift over time, we can perceive that situations may change. Thus, there is hope. Furthermore, discourse analysis shows us many points of intervention through which any activist oriented scholar might resist social injustice and inequity if they so desire – we all have power to bring about change.

Foucault's philosophy, methods, writings, and insights are not uncontested. Major philosophical and methodological criticisms are illustrated for instance by Callewaert's (2006) account of Pierre Bourdieu's critiques of Foucault's work. As an example, Bourdieu drew attention to the illogicity of arguing against yet still making use of the very things that allowed Foucault to pose his radical questions of social and political life – empirical methods,

archeology, genealogy, the authority of the University and subject positions within it, et cetera. Foucault's writing's have been criticized for their density and intelligibility (Searle, in Krajewski, 1987), more recently his interests in the self-as-individual over more collectivist concerns have emerged as a site of critique (see for instance Dean and Zamora, 2018). A more practical concern with Foucault's approach to social research is his occupation with discourse, language and culture. The worry is that if social and political analyses are overly reliant upon discursive readings of the world, the material actualities of people's lives and the wicked problems they face will be seriously underserved (Lemke, 2015).

Nevertheless, like others I have been drawn to the affordances of Foucault's philosophy and tools for inquiry in educational research within early childhood education because of the way it draws out the workings of power at the macro and micro levels, provides avenues for intervention, and theorises the *self*. With Foucault I resist the impulse to pessimism and helplessness when things get hard and the efforts forge change for what I think is the better, fail. Reading situations of injustice and inequity through a lens of Foucauldian discourse analysis, especially situations I catch myself in the midst of perpetuating, means I can temporarily separate myself out from event, consider the workings of power relations that have contributed to what happened – their origins, contingencies and effects – and look for different ways to intervene next. Foucault's work has taught me that we are always imbued with, and operating from within, particular discourses, without them we have no subject position to claim, authority with which to act, knowledge to produce (and impose) nor power to seek change with. With a critical lens upon the discourses that shape education work, we

can make different decisions (or at least understand the logic around the decisions we have come to make) and pursue different actions in the pursuit of equity and optimistic change.

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