

Beyond the Panopticon : Accounting for Behaviour in Parent@Teacher Communicationsf

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ABSTRACT

Foucault has shown how institutional discourses and practices operate to regulate the conduct of the social populace, linking the constitution of individual subjects to the objective of improving the condition of the population of the whole.

Incorporating Foucault's notion of 'governmentality', this paper will analyse segments of parent@teacher talk and extracts from a number of printed materials addresses to parents of students attending various secondary schools in Brisbane.

Using an ethnomethodological approach, I will show how individuals in such institutional sites are mutually constituted and positioned through the use of distinct educational discourses which act as textual practices of social regulation and control.

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Keywords : *f*
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My area of interest is that of researching Home@School (ie. parent@teacher) relationships as evidenced in language (both talk and printed materials) used in a variety of educational sites where parents and teachers meet.

Research data has been obtained from twenty@six secondary schools in Brisbane, which include both private and independent schools, co@educational and single sex schools.

Data includes both talk (for example, parent@teacher interviews, induction day for prospective grade eight parents, and speech nights) and printed materials (such as school prospectuses, newsletters, and media advertisements for schools, etc.). Spoken data has been obtained by the use of audio and video recordings, wherein the participants have given permission for them to be used for this research, and printed materials have been supplied to me by a variety of colleagues and friends who have children attending these schools, and from material provided as marketing (ie. advertising) techniques, such as that available at the Independent Schools Expo, held in Brisbane every September.

I am using an ethnomethodological approach to analyse 'naturally occurring' everyday texts (both talk and print) in order to answer three main research questions :

- 1 What are home@school relationships like, and how are they assembled and constituted when parents and teachers of secondary school children/students meet using language as the mode?

2 What sorts of identities and images of each other and their institutions are constituted in such meetings? and

3 How do participants position each other using language (both talk and print) when they meet?

Although I make no claim regarding the representativeness of my data, it seems that certain topics and themes appear to be raised recurrently in the language used at various educational sites in a number of the secondary schools from where my data originated. As a result of this, I am organizing my PhD thesis findings in the following three sections :

Secondary schools and the commodification of education (that is, secondary schools in the marketplace)

2 Texts as actively organising social organization and

3 Secondary School parent@teacher communication texts as evidence of social regulatory practices

This paper will be concerned primarily with the final section, taking

a Foucauldian perspective, to look at examples of school situated talk and printed materials which appear to be functioning as technologies of social regulation and control. Participants in talk and authors of written materials originating from secondary schools can be seen to talk themselves and each other into existence within these texts. They actively position themselves and each other, thereby evidencing such texts as actively mediating social organisation (Smith,1990).

Parent@teacher communications contain textual evidence of struggle. Participants in talk and authors of written materials originating from secondary schools demonstrate tactics and strategies through which they constitute moral versions of themselves (ie. through which they present positive subjectivities to each other)

and their respective institutions of homes and schools.

Using a Foucauldian approach, it is my intention to analyse some of the subtle tensions and competitions evidenced in a variety of examples of parent@teacher communications, in both oral and printed modes, wherein the appearance and positioning of student bodies in time and space are topicalised. The ways by which the adults (parents and teachers) constitute themselves, and by which they constitute their relationships with their children/students in these texts allow them to maintain positive moral versions of themselves, despite having to account for certain practices which might be read or heard as a lack of diligence.

It is my intention in this presentation firstly to summarise some of the features of Foucauldian theory which have influenced my analysis, and then present some examples of my data (both talk and print) as evidence that many school based communications addressed to parents, teachers or secondary school students might be viewed as practices of social regulation and surveillance. In order to do this I will provide a basic summary of some of the Foucauldian perspectives I'm using for purposes of my analysis.

The Foucauldian Framework :

In the words of Turner (1991:22/23), Foucault was especially interested in "... the construction of both a micropolitics of regulation of the body and a macropolitics of the body. These two preoccupations with body and population as 'the two places around which the organisation of power over life was deployed' (Foucault,1880:139) led Foucault into the study of

nineteenth medical and disciplinary changes as responses to the peculiar problems of urban control, particularly in France ..."

Michel Foucault's work might be viewed as having three main phases (McHoul & Grace, 1993) :

1 His description of discourses or disciplines of knowledge

2 Political questions of power and control of the population through disciplinary practices and

3 The theory of 'the self'

For the purposes of this paper I will be using primarily the ideas Foucault expressed in works written during his second phase which are contained in a number of his publications, those being, most particularly :Discipline & Punish : The Birth of the Prison (1977), The History of Sexuality : Vol.1 : An Introduction (1979), and Power/Knowledge : Selected Interviews and Other Writings(1980).

Foucault is viewed as a poststructuralist. Themes characteristic to the poststructuralist genre include the centrality of conceptions of language, the relational nature of all totalities, the practices of linguistic signification, the de@centring of the human constitutive subject, and a concern with discourse (Clegg,1989:150)

According to Miller (1987:12), Foucault's works comprise the most outstanding contribution to our understanding of how the government of individuals in western societies operates through a variety of discourses and practices which seek to constitute human individuals as subjects, and to do so through notions of truth

During Foucault's initial period of work, prior to the publication of Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison, he was concerned particularly with the conception of discourses (that is, bodies of knowledge). For Foucault "... discourses are knowledges; [and] knowledges are collected into disciplines..." (McHoul & Grace,1993:42). Foucault saw discourse as not just a form of representation; [but] ... a material condition (or set of conditions) which [both] enables and constrains the socially constructive 'imagination' (McHoul & Grace,1993:93)

In his publication The Order of Things (1970), Foucault deals with rules of the formation of knowledges, arguing that "... the historical analysis of ... discourse should be ... subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice..." (p.xiv).

Fundamental to his view of discursive practices is that of power. To Foucault (1979a:93) "... power is everywhere..." . Using a Foucauldian perspective of power, Lukes (1986:229) suggested that

in a society such as ours ... there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this accumulation

Foucault links power to knowledge by his use of the term discipline. To him the term signifies both knowledges particular to certain practical domains, and to the disciplining (that is, control) of the body. It is in his second phase of works, published in English from 1977 to 1980, that Foucault deals particularly with the relations of power and the control of the social populace. Foucault's view of power through discipline is that it is both constraining and enabling, which is quite unlike, for example, the view of Marxists who view power as being oppressive. As Rose (1990:4) stated, when using a Foucauldian perspective regarding new devices that have been invented which bear upon the existence of people and their relations with one another: the relations between power and subjectivity are ... not confined to those of the constraint or repression of the freedom of the individual ... [but rather] modern knowledge and expertise ... have ... their role in the stimulation of subjectivity.

Foucault came to his view of power on the basis of his particular methodologies of historical investigation which he termed archeology and genealogy. Writing of France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) that during this time governmental control of the population shifted from that of sovereign power (or rule by the sovereign) to that of

governmental control through parliamentary democracy. He suggested that as a result of the development of capitalism which appeared at that time, a new form of power developed which shifted the control of individual bodies as physical objects upon which retribution for misdeeds could be directly administered (in the form of corporeal punishment under the auspices of the sovereign), to that of the government of the entire social body. In this form of government individuals were positioned as both subjects and objects of surveillance and control. In capitalist societies "... the body must become productive and generative within the political field..." (Kirk & Spiller, 1994:89). Foucault coined the phrase 'disciplinary society' to conceptualise this form of social regularisation. According

to Foucault (1977:25026), the body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault demonstrated the connection between a particular savoir [or way of knowing], the question of the government of the population and the maximisation its resources, and the formation of the individual as object of knowledge (Miller, 1987:157).

Indeed, as he had previously stated in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972:131)

human subjects and historical events are not firm and distant entities but are fragmented and changing sites across which the flows of power move. Foucault envisioned three main ways in which power regulated the populace.

Firstly he spoke of 'governmentality' which is the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very special albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population (Foucault, 1979b)

Secondly, Foucault does not view power as being an object, but rather sees individuals as being caught up and actively engaged in constituting their relative positions of power in networks or grids of 'disciplinary power'. Individuals' subjectivities are constituted through a myriad of discursive practices of disciplinary power, which target particular individuals or collections of individuals; that is, a capillary form of power which reaches into the very grain of individuals' synaptic regime of power, a regime of its exercise within the social body, rather than from above it (Foucault, 1980:39)

Finally, Foucault raises the possibility of 'bio@power` as that which is "... oriented to the subjugation of bodies and control of population in general ..." (Clegg, 1989:155).

Central to Foucault's conceptions of power is "... its shifting, inherently unstable expression in networks and alliances..." (Clegg, 1989:154). Within parent@teacher communications the positionings and repositionings of the participants within talk, and readers and writers of written texts demonstrate the shifting nature of discursive practices within the language used, thereby evidencing the relative and changing versions of power as envisaged by Foucault. Certain formalized

types of knowledge may reside within 'experts (such as teachers or doctors), but as such they acquire or transfer their knowledge through discourses. Although there is no univocal or unchallengeable measure of occupational status; there are only competing versions, each of which is incomplete because it engages in certain exclusions..." (Agger, 1991:28), teachers appear to be positioned as school experts in discourses used when parents and teachers meet in a variety of educational sites. Similarly, parents may be positioned as 'home` experts. However, it seems that school discourses

dominate in talk and printed texts used as modes of communications when parents and teachers meet, signifying that school knowledge is what counts within such locations. Indeed, school discourse tends to colonize home space as evidenced within a number of examples of my data, which will be presented later in this paper.

Central to Foucault's conceptions of discourse and power/knowledge are the processes of normalisation and individualisation. One way of achieving these for the purposes of social regulation is by the use of examinations, which, to Foucault, combined "... the exercise of surveillance, the application of normalising judgement and the technique of material inscription to produce calculable traces of individuality..." (Rose,1990:7). In a previous paper (Baker & Keogh,1994), we showed how the achievement level of students was made the topic of talk in a number of parent@teacher interviews. In all the interview data analysed, student achievement levels, as evidenced from their school work grade levels or marks, were central to the talk. These grades were provided by the teachers on the basis of pieces of work which students produced for assessment (that is, for examination) purposes. Rose (1990:7) states that

the examination not only makes human individuality visible, it locates it in a web of writing, transcribing attributes and their variations into codified forms, enabling them to be accumulated, summated, averaged and normalized @ in short, documented.

In rendering individual subjectivity calculable, and in being able to calculate 'norms' (that is, in 'normalising student achievement and behaviour), the populace is more easily regulated for the purposes of disciplinary power. Indeed, teachers are positioned as institutional agents of regulatory power.

A key concept underlying Foucauldian theory of regulatory control is that of surveillance. This emphasis came from the architectural design of the Panopticon as a building which rendered all the inhabitants of a particular institution visible in that all could be observed from a central building termed a Panopticon.

Although Jeremy Bentham designed this structure specifically as a prison, Foucault suggests that this architectural technology of control became adopted in other state institutions, such as hospitals and schools. Although the observer could gaze on the entire population of a social institution, the design did not enable the inhabitants to observe the observer, or to know when the observer might be watching them.

Because of this, individuals tended to regulate themselves and their own bodies, rather than being regulated. According to Foucault, therefore "... surveillance comes from the inside as well as the outside..." (Agger, 1991:36). That is, individuals became agents of their own subjugation, or, stated in a different way, individual subjectivities are adopted through social practices of self regulation of the body according to particular institutional discourses of knowledge and regimes of truth.

Although Foucault viewed governmentality as being pervasive, and situated within institutional discourses, he allowed for the possibility of resistance.

He emphasised the existence of micro practices of power as evidenced in various institutional sites demonstrating such situations as being sites of struggle and negotiation. Foucault believed that it was only through the analysis of various micro-sites that practices of power or governmentality might be identified. Indeed, Agger (1991:11) stated specifically, when talking of school based relationships, that it is not enough to analyse power relationships between teachers and students, mediated by the state apparatus. In addition, textuality itself must be interrogated for the ways in which texts become potent language games of their own in which power is encoded and through which it is transacted

It is partially in response to this suggestion that I shall now analyse examples of school based texts in order to examine the relationships not just of teachers and students, but also of teachers, students, and the students' parents.

Examination of institutional texts :

The appearance and positioning of individual student bodies in space and time

evidence practices of social regulation and control. Within a number of school based talk and texts wherein parents and teachers meet, the topic of their children's/students' appearance and their positioning within space and time are raised. The adult speakers or writers of such examples of spoken and written texts are positioned as institutional agents of regulation and control. That is, such texts can be seen to actively mediate social organization (Smith,1990).

Analysis of Parent@Teacher Talk :

The following extract is taken from a parent@teacher interview that took place at a state secondary school in Brisbane. The students, here named 'Donna', as well as her parents and teacher, was present. The analysis of such talk is of interest in that parent@teacher interviews are one of the educational sites in which the institutional identities of parents, teachers and students are assembled and talked into being. In effect, parent@teacher contact language becomes the means by which the public or official faces of home and school are presented to each other. These constructions of realities are not neutral, but reflect regimes of truth within official, public institutional discourses. The following extract has been selected because herein the topic of the student's position within space and time is raised in relation to her individualisation through talk regarding her academic achievement.

Interview

Segment 1 :

Participants present :The student ('Donna`), her parents and her English teacher.

1 Okay all right we'll just forget it I should cover it up or something I hate tape recorders! hh right um Donna um I just took over Mister Jay's class um four weeks ago so, I don't really know a lot about Donna's work I've had a quick look at her work in her folder, and from her marks she um, you seem to have, passed in the first part of the year and then really gone down in last two um, pieces of work which was a poetry oral? an a um a novel (2.0) a novel in another form that was putting part of the novel into another style of writing. Now um (2.0) in class (1.0) Donna's a little bit distracted? often? down the back there, with um the girls that she sits with, though she does give in class when she' asked to, she does all her work, um I'm (1.0) would you like to, do you work with Donna at home with her schoolwork at all? do you see it at all or?

2 Not really no

3 (We very rarely) see her homework

4 They generally disappear off to their bedrooms with their homework and um

5 Ye:s (2.0) well um

6 We don't see much of (it)

7 Let me see yes I didn't mark this this was all Mr Jay's ...

Similar to every case studied within the corpus of the eleven parent@teacher interviews that I have transcribed to date, the academic achievement of the student ('Donna`) is initially 'found' as the opening topic by the teacher. Already, the inscription of calculable individualisation of the student as object of control is demonstrated within this particular parent@teacher talk with the teacher's presentation of the student's marks for assessment items undertaken. ("... from her marks she um, you seem to have passed in the first part of the year and

then
really gone down in the last tw um, pieces of work which was a poetry
oral? an' a
um novel ..."). Advice is given by the teacher regarding how to
improve the
student's achievement. Within this extract the intended audience of
the teacher's
talk seems to continually be changing © the teacher commences speaking
to the student herself directly, addressing her by name, and
then changes from using the
proper noun (Donna) to that of the third person singular pronoun,
denoting that she
is now talking about the student rather talking directly to
her. The student is within
the first utterance by the teacher, textually positioned as an
overhearing audience
(cf. Heritage, 1985), and is, in the main silenced, for the remainder
of this interview.

Both the classroom and the home are definite geographical spaces with
definite
boundaries. Talk concerning school and home space becomes topicalised
early in
this interview. The boundaries of the spaces shift, and at times the
teacher
colonises home space as an extension of school space by her talk. The
positioning of the student within social and moral space becomes
topicalised as a
problem. Where, and with whom the student is sitting becomes the issue
in this
interview.

The teacher provides advice regarding Donna's achievement, linking her
recent
disappointing academic results to her location within classroom space.
Within this
talk, geographical classroom space becomes moral and social space. It
appears
from this teacher's initial utterance that the student, Donna,

positions herself

"...down at the back there..."

and that she is often

"... a little bit distracted ..." with "... the girls that she sits
with..."

The teacher constructs classroom space as moral space, and the students who sit in such the unacceptable space in the back of the room as perhaps being morally improper. The back of the classroom might be viewed as space beyond the gaze of the teacher; that is, the student has positioned herself 'beyond the Panopticon'. In this talk the teacher positions herself as not being fully accountable for this student's behaviour in the classroom space at the back of the room which is beyond her direct gaze. Donna is here made responsible for positioning herself in space which is beyond this teacher's powers of surveillance and control. In the way the teacher retains her moral version of herself as a suitably diligent regulatory agent. Thus it is that the student held responsible for the problem of her achievement. It seems that the student is constituted by the teacher here as needing to internalise the adult gaze in order to regulate her own behaviour in space other than that at the back of the classroom, and thereby achieve better academic results.

The topic of school work and achievement is then immediately linked to 'other' space beyond the geographical boundaries of the classroom walls by the teacher within her first utterance. Having positioned herself as not being fully accountable for the student's poor level of achievement in the space of the classroom wherein the student's parents might expect her to take responsibility for surveillance and control, the teacher now she raises the issue of surveillance by the parents when she talks of schoolwork that she implies should be supervised by the student's parents in their home space. The teacher questions the use of home space when she asks the student's parents whether they "... work with Donna at home with her schoolwork at all...".

Here it seems that the teacher is holding the parents as being accountable for surveillance of Donna's behaviour at home. Although Donna's parents implicate

themselves as possibly not being 'good' parents in that they say they
"... (very rarely) see her homework...",

their possibly heard lack of diligence is deflected by their
implication within their talk
that their responsibility doesn't include Donna's private bedroom
space, wherein
she is beyond their parental gaze. Similar to Donna's teacher, these
parents retain
their constitution as being that of morally acceptable parents, in that
Donna is, once
again, constituted as being herself responsible for behaviour within
her privatebedroom space.

According to Dorothy Smith (1987), schools position mothers of primary
school
children as being adjunct teachers. It seems from the above extract of
parent™teacher talk which took place in a secondary school that this
student's home is also
constructed almost as a school annexe, and the parents are positioned
as being
auxilliary teachers in this space beyond the school walls. School
discourse
dominates the talk in this educational site, actively colonising the
home space and
family time. Subtle tensions and competitions are herein evidenced
between the
teacher and the parents, demonstrating this site as being one of
inter@institutional
struggle between home and school.

Analysis of a number of other parent@teacher interviews which took
place both in
other state and private secondary schools has demonstrated that finding
the 'right'
moral space and the 'right' group of students with whom to sit
recurringly becomes
topicalised. Such recurring features in talk evidence Foucault's
notion of the
normalising and regulatory power of institutional discourse in relation
to the
positioning of docile bodies within geographical spaces. These are
constituted as
being moral spaces within such talk. The adults account for their
behaviour in
terms of surveillance of their children/students within these spaces.
Any

implications by other adults that their powers of regulation have perhaps been somewhat remiss are deflected by the adults in the way they position the children/students as being held responsible for their own behaviour in spaces beyond the adults' gaze. It seems that the secondary children who are both spoken to talked about in these positions are recurrently held as being responsible for making their own decisions regarding the suitable placement and positioning of their own bodies within institutional spaces of home and school. This is similar to Silverman's (1987) findings regarding medical consultations in a cleft palate clinic, where the adolescent children were present. Analysis of this talk, as within parent-teacher interviews, revealed a delicate management

between adult responsibility and student autonomy.

Analysis of School Printed Texts Addressed to Parents :

In a previous paper (Keogh, 1992), I have analysed in depth a letter sent to the parents of students attending a private secondary school by describing the 'order of events' as evidenced in the sequence of topics dealt with in the letter, and by discussing the major moral categorizations which were assembled by this text. Similar to the parent-teacher interviews earlier discussed, the positioning in space of student bodies, and their surveillance by the adult gaze also became topicalized within this letter.

The author of this letter constructs a 'Curriculum for Homes' in that she makes suggestions as to how parents might maintain the moral order of the school by maintaining vigilance of their children during their vacation, which was about to commence.

Paragraph 1 :

Dear Parents

Thank you for supporting your son or daughter through a very challenging and rewarding term. It is most pleasing to note the

special

efforts of those parents who have taken the time to attend the many sporting and cultural events of the term, and who have, at the same time, remained steadfast in the commitment to the standards and expectations we have at ...[name of the school]

Within this letter, the author@as@school agent presents directions regarding 'good' parenting by positioning parents as ancilliary teachers for the period of the vacation @ "in loco pedagogis" in effect. Within the first paragraph the author are thanked for

"... supporting your son or daughter through a very challenging and rewarding term ...",

and for

"... the special efforts of those parents who have taken the time to attend the many sporting and cultural events of the term, and who have, at the same time, remained steadfast in their commitment to the standards and expectations we have at ...[the name of the school]...".

The constructive use of time is, herein immediately raised in relation to good parenting practices.

Paragraph 6 :

You should be aware that there is another style of Clarks shoes in the boys shoes (sic) called "Docs" which are available, but which we do not support as a regulation shoe. The shoe is a trend at the moment and is a reflection of the mediocre standards accepted by some but certainly not accepted at [name of school]

The topic of students' bodily appearance is also raised in this letter in paragraph six, and is linked to parental surveillance when the author writes

"...You should also be aware that there is another style of Clarks shoes in the boys shoes called "Docs" which are available, but which we do not support as a regulation shoe. This shoe is a trend at the moment and is a

reflection of the
mediocre standards accepted by some but certainly not accepted by ...
[name of
the school]..."

Thus it is that bodily appearance is constituted as indicative of
standards of
behaviour which needs to be rigorously regulated.

The topic of space beyond the classroom and home is also raised in this
same
paragraph, and is linked directly to the adult gaze : "... It is
disappointing to be told
by the shop assistants at Mathers that some parents are allowing their
son or
daughter to purchase the incorrect shoe..." It seems that adult
surveillance is
maintained beyond the institutional spaces of home and school for the
purposes of
regulation of the entire community populace. The Panoptic gaze is
constituted as
extending beyond home and school space and out into the space of the
larger
community beyond. Both parents and their student children are here
reminded of
the all seeing but unseen observation from the Panopticon. Parents are
here also
explicitly directed to comply with the regulation of school discipline
beyond the
school walls, or to become subjects of this disciplinary power
themselves (The sub
text might perhaps be "We have ways of making you conform"!)

Neither is this letter an isolated example of the stress laid upon
student bodily
appearances, and use of time and moral space.

For example, in all the secondary school prospectuses I have collected
as
components of my research data the importance of bodily appearance is
explicitly
emphasised with directions regarding the importance of students wearing
the
correct uniform. For example, the prospectus of one secondary school

located in a
less than prosperous geographical location in the outer suburbs of
Brisbanespecifically states under the heading "Dress" that

Students are expected to be neatly dressed in school uniform at all times. Hair must be kept neatly groomed. On no account may thongs, jeans or ordinary sandals be worn ...".

The reason provided for the necessity of not wearing such "ordinary sandals" is given as a Department of Education Directive that all students who are likely to enter a laboratory, kitchen, Manual Arts Workshop or an Art Department workshop must wear adequate footwear [because] ... on rare occasions (sic) students with poorly protected feet have been injured by sharp objects, dangerous substances or hot liquids

It seems that the penalties for not conforming to dress regulations could injure the students' physical wellbeings quite drastically!

In this same prospectus, immediately above the section titled "Dress" is a section headed "Travelling To And From School". Here it is specified that

Students should be aware that while travelling to and from school they are under the joint control of parents and the school. It is expected that behaviour during these times will reflect favourably on the school. Students must line up and wait in an orderly fashion in the designated areas to catch the bus or meet parents

The regulation of the student populace of this school is, once again, subject to the panoptic gaze. Behaviour is regulated by specific instructions regarding the comportment and movement of student bodies in space.

In addition the preceding example of the textual regulation of bodily appearances, evidence in my research data suggests that this is not an isolated case. Most schools, in addition to textual directives regarding appearance and movement, relay directions to parents about the surveillance and regulation of student behaviour. On independent school, for example, sent the following directive contained in the first newsletter sent to its parents at the beginning of a new school year :

Please ensure that students are aware of the code of conduct

and of
the regulations regarding the wearing of correct school uniform. It is
the parents' responsibility to see that students are properly outfitted
and well groomed at all times. Cleanliness and tidiness are essential
factors in a student's appearance and an outward sign of respect for
themselves and others. All items of the uniform must be clean and
kept in good repair. The school will endeavour to cooperate with
parents on matters of behaviour and dress and likewise we expect that

parents will support the school policies

Code of Conduct frequently features in printed materials
sent home to parents
of secondary school students, and these too are designed as
technologies of social
regulation and control. I found, with interest, that two of my
researched school
actually specified the same key terms in their codes of behaviour,
although
sequenced in a different order of precedence. They were namely
Courtesy, consideration, cooperation and common
sense

Another school detailed its code of behaviour under the headings "courtesy,
standards and respect". Within one private school's "Parents'
Information Handbook" it is stated that

The Code of Behaviour was adopted by the ... school after a
great deal
of thought and discussion. It sets out the requirements of the school
and it is important that students understand their responsibilities in
regard to the Code of behaviour. Parents are asked to read through
the Code with their child and to ensure its contents are fully
understood

Fully understood by whom is left vaguely ambiguous © does the author
imply that the
parents or students should fully understand the contents of this
school's Code of Behaviour?

Parents are recurrently addressed in printed texts directed to them as
being agents
of social regulation and control in an adjunct position to that of the
teachers, in a
similar way to techniques evidenced in my parent-teacher talk data.
Parents are
expected to maintain the moral order of the school in geographical
spatial areas
beyond the school boundaries. Unlike talk data, however, it is not

possible to know
how such directives are received or read by their recipients. As
Foulcauldian
theory suggests, there are multiple realities and multiple readings of
texts which
create multiple subjectivities. Some parents might receive such textual
directives in
the a manner that might suggest that they take the role as regulator of
their
children's behaviour, movement and appearance seriously. Others might
view
such directives as being, to them, trivial. Some might hear themselves
as being
addressed as 'good' parents, who conform to school regulatory
practices. Others
might, equally, hear themselves as being remiss.

Evidence of such differences of parental responses were verbally
recounted to me
by two different mothers who both had children attending the same
private
secondary school. Both of them commented upon a letter which they had

received
earlier that week which dealt with the situation of senior students
having part time
paid work, written by the Principal of the school and addressed as
"Dear Parents".

The third paragraph commenced thus :

It is of great concern that over and above this [earlierspecified] amalgam
of study and relaxation, many of our ...[students] in Years 11 and 12
are
trying to balance an outside job as well. No one disagrees that
part@time
employment provides a valuable experience of being in the workforce
and
that for some it is an economic necessity. However, there are some
...[students], especially those working in the fast food chains who are
spending extraordinarily long and late hours in their jobs. This makes
it
virtually impossible for them to give their best to their studies and
to be alert and awake during lessons.

The following paragraph then continued

I would ask you to discuss this matter seriously with your
...[child] if it is applicable ... It is imperative in Years 11
and 12 that together you and your ...[child] try to rationalise

and prioritise activities so that ...[your child] is able to devote productive and constructive time to ... studies.

One mother told me that she read this letter as a reasonable warning regarding the dangers of conflicting loyalties regarding school work and paid part time work, recounting that she received the letter as a rational explanation for not recommending outside work if students' achievement levels were to remain high. The other mother recounted, quite angrily, that she felt the Principal was overstepping her mark as far as regulation of her child's behaviour outside school time was concerned, and rejected the Principal's advice which she received as a prohibition of the possibility of senior school students attending that school having part time paid employment.

From research the above data of some examples of parent@teacher contact language, both in oral and printed modes that I have analysed to date, it seems reasonable to view schools as institutions of regulation and control; that is, disciplinary power tactics are evidenced within such parent@teacher communications in both modes of print and talk. Adults are positioned as agents of student surveillance and regulation, and as being responsible for supervising their secondary school students/children to conform to practices of governmentality, as described by Foucault particularly in his works published in English between 1977 and 1980. Teachers constitute themselves as the 'unseen but all@seeing observers' of the behaviours of institutional inmates of

the schools (that is, the students). Parents are positioned as adjunct agents of regulation, and are directed to maintain the moral order of the schools within time and space beyond the geographical boundaries of the schools. Thus it is that parent @teacher text and talk evidence strategies of disciplinary power as it functions pervasively, across the entire population, in a capillary way.

Finally, I must complete this paper with my favourite school directive

as specified in
a newsletter addressed to students who were about to embark on an
overseas school
trip, but most likely also indirrectly addressing parents who would
also be anticipated
as reading the directions regarding the students' moral use of their
bodily space :

Physical contact is not allowed

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