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“Excavating processes of legitimised exclusion through a Foucaultian genealogy”

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Looking to Local Conditions

This paper is from the first section of my PhD study in which I seek to understand what local conditions of possibility (Foucault, 1980b; Tamboukou, 1999) might, first of all, inform the construction of deficit conceptualisations of particular schoolchildren and, second, may work to legitimise the differential treatment of such children within the Queensland educational context.

The research focus is on the construction of ‘Otherness’ as it relates to problematic behaviour in schools but this is not just another argument that ‘ADHD/behaviour disorder’ is a social construct. I take the Foucaultian position that is not necessary to engage in “a battle ‘on behalf’ of the truth” by debating “the philosophical presuppositions that may lie within” that truth nor the epistemological foundations that may legitimate it (Foucault, 1972, p.205). Instead, Foucault maintains that to “tackle the ideological function of a science in order to reveal and modify it”, one should “question it as a discursive formation” (Foucault, 1972, p.205). This strategy involves mapping the system by which particular objects are formed and the “types of enunciations” implicated (Foucault, 1972, p.205).

I take this to mean that instead of engaging in a battle of truth and fiction with the human sciences as to the existence of ‘ADHD’; my purpose is to consider not whether ‘ADHD/behaviour disorder’ is true but how its objects become formed; that is, how is this ‘difference’ articulated and brought to attention and what might be the “effects in the real” (Foucault, 1980a, p.237).

Therefore, this research attempts to engage with and in that battle by problematising how ‘what is’ (Foucault, 1980a, p.236), in relation to the naming of a particular ‘Other’, might come into being; that is, to question “on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, do the practices that we accept rest….” (Foucault, 1988, 154-155 in Olssen, 1999, p.113). As such, I look first to pedagogical policies and resourcing mechanisms as systematic practices complicit in the formation of a particular form of ‘Otherness’, that which speaks of particular types of children as ‘disordered’, ‘disruptive’ or ‘disturbed’ objects; and second, to particular pedagogical discursive formations, in other words, looking to statements made about schoolchildren as ‘enunciations’ that undergird the ‘Othering’ of particular children in an ostensibly inclusive educational environment.
Fashioning a ‘Net’ of Inquiry

Using poststructural theory, in particular the work of Foucault, I plan to interrogate official educational policies, resourcing mechanisms and testing procedures as interlocking threads within a textual ‘fabric’ which is bound together by institutional and deficit discourses to act, in Foucaultian terms, as categorical grids of specification (Luke, 2001). Engaging with and extending this Foucaultian metaphor of a discursive/technological grid, Scheurich (1997) discusses the construction of a problematic group occurring within what he describes as a ‘grid of social regularities’ (Foucault, 1980b; Scheurich, 1997, pp.98, 107).

Importantly, for my discussion of pedagogical policy discourse and resourcing mechanisms, Scheurich describes this grid as “both epistemological and ontological; [for it] it constitutes both who the problem group is and how the group is seen or known as a problem” (Scheurich, 1997, p.107). Whilst borrowing from Foucault and Scheurich, rather than constitute this methodological metaphor as a grid, suggesting an inflexible structure, I imagine instead a net constructed with intersecting threads, which is tight enough to capture its object but allows permeability for the non-object to pass through.

Following Scheurich’s suggestion of epistemological and ontological actions, I position these intersecting threads as axes. First, a vertical axis, which I call “Enunciating Otherness” - depicting pedagogical discourses or discursive practices that determine who the problem group is; and a horizontal axis which I call ‘Objectifying Otherness’ – representing institutional policies, and
mechanisms as disciplinary technologies that determine *how* the group is seen or known as a problem.

This is consistent with Foucault’s suggestion to tackle ‘truth’ by questioning it as discursive formation; here the ‘Enunciating Otherness’ Axis, interrogates enunciations or discourses that speak to particular ‘truths’, and the ‘Objectifying Otherness’ Axis, examines the institutional practices and mechanisms that intersect with the productive power of those discourses to produce “a system of formation” of certain truth-objects.

I see this methodological metaphor as helpful to examine how pedagogical policies, practices and mechanisms, which are generally studied in singular form (Grieshaber, 1997; Henderson, 2002), might work together. That is: what are the effects of these policies in unison? How do they cooperate, intersect, inform and fold back in upon each other? And what of the effects?

**Education Queensland Policies**

For the purposes of this presentation, I will briefly demonstrate how using this methodological metaphor informs my analysis of the Education Queensland policies I consider in this study, the Developmental Continua and Year 2 Diagnostic Net, Appraisement Intervention, Ascertainment Procedures.

**The Developmental Continua**

This brings me to the first thread on my net, where I ponder how it is that something for which there is no reliable definition nevertheless becomes ‘defined’ through normalising practices. There is no definitive model of ‘Normal’, because there is no singular manifestation of either normal or abnormal. ‘Normal’ is typically described by what it is not. However, in Queensland primary schools the Developmental Continua operates to demarcate between what is considered developmentally ‘abnormal’ in young children, and thereby actively predicates notions of what it is to be a ‘normal’ young child.

Currently in Queensland, children enter Grade One the year they are to turn six years old. Upon their entry into Grade One and through to Grade 3, children are closely monitored and their rate of learning tested through the application of the Developmental Continua. This is a charting system
that maps a child’s progress through key indicators (or “commonly agreed milestones”) that the Education Queensland supporting literature states are “grouped into phases of development” that are considered “typical in young children” (*Year 2 Diagnostic Net*, 1998).

However, in identifying deviance from this abstract norm, the Developmental Continua actively defines notions of what it is to be a ‘normal’ young child. Those children who do not develop at the same rate as their ‘average’ peers are then marked and targeted for remedial programs, such as *Support-a-Reader* and *Support-a-Writer*. The Developmental Continua results are also used as an indicator of school performance. Schools must endeavour to remain within the departmentally ‘accepted’ percentage of children falling below age-based norms. If they do not, the school itself comes under scrutiny.

Now, obviously there is research supporting the rationale behind identification methods such as the Developmental Continua and the scrutinising of school/teacher performance and like Foucault, I maintain a critical position in that “not everything is bad but everything is dangerous” (Foucault, 1984). Whilst probably adequately performing the function it was designed to do, the Developmental Continua is dangerous because it is a normalising mechanism functioning in Foucaultian terms as a disciplinary technology or a form of “power that shape[s] subjects… through the process of normalisation” (Olssen, 1999, p.24). The Developmental Continua also qualifies as a method of surveilling, normalising, classifying and representing very young children in what Olssen describes as “biologically essentialist terms” (Olssen, 1999, p.161).

**Mapping ‘Normality’**
When one ‘defines’ something, one invokes parameters, draws boundaries, and decides what is in and what is out. In doing this, the Developmental Continua demarcates what is normal and offers up ‘Otherness’ to more specialised mechanisms for their autopsy.

**The Year 2 Diagnostic Net**

Although the Developmental Continua is applied from Grades 1 to 3 and serves to elucidate children’s progress or non-progress during that period, its main locating function is called upon 15 months after a child begins Grade 1. Towards the end of second term in Grade 2, each child’s position is plotted on the Developmental Continua and then examined in reference to predetermined developmental or age-based norms. Through the application of this formal testing apparatus, those children falling below the specified level of acceptable proficiency in reading, writing and number are identified and targeted for remedial programs. Appropriately for my study, the expression for their capture is that they have been “Caught in the Net”.

The Year 2 Diagnostic Net is aptly named for it is designed to diagnose and pathologise differential learning rates in children. This medical metaphor is consistent with Scheurich’s (1997) critique of postpositivist approaches, which “assume that a social problem, for which a policy solution is needed, is like a disease”(Scheurich, 1997, p.95). This ‘way of seeing’ is problematic as the child’s difficulty is predicated as natural, organic, biological or as Education Queensland states, ‘neurologically based’ (Appraisement Intervention, 2001; Year 2 Diagnostic Net, 1998), suggesting therefore, that the ‘educational problem’ resides wholly within the defective organism that is the “slower learner” (Appraisement Intervention, 2001, p.6).
Dianne Snow, however, elucidates in her historical study of disability integration, how the introduction of age-grade-content policy to schools in 1905 dramatically altered the scholastic expectations and “rhythm of 19th century schooling”, leading to the identification of “a staggering 50% of students from 3rd to 5th grade [as] ‘retarded’” (Snow, 1990, p.32). Snow contends that within a relatively short period of 13 years, “the reorganisation of government schooling had resulted in a syllabus which had begun to define the normal student as one who complied with the age-grade-content policy” (Snow, 1990, p.32), arguing that “schools did not simply ‘discover’ the ‘feeble-minded’ who had already been defined as such by medical expertise but that the state school system actively helped to create them” (Snow, 1990, p.29). Similarly, and almost a century down the track, the Developmental Continua and Year 2 Diagnostic Net function to identify and mark those children who do not comply with age-grade-content learning rate policy.

As discussed earlier, Scheurich (1997) discusses the construction of a problematic group occurring within “a ‘grid of social regularities’ which ‘arrange’ the ‘seeing’ of this target group, the seeing of it as a problem group” (Scheurich, 1997, pp.98, 107). Following from Scheurich then, the Developmental Continua and its demarcation of the ‘normal’ child-learner can be viewed as a product of developmental/educational psychology discourse; a particular discursive formation predicated on the developmental psychological practice of ‘normalisation’. Informed by developmental psychological discourse, the Continua works to constitute both who the problem group is (learning problematic children performing under an age-grade-content based norm) and, together with the application of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net, actively constitutes how the group becomes ‘known’, that is how it is located or identified (Scheurich, 1997, p.107).

Mapping the ‘Learning Problematic’
The *Year 2 Net* not only captures children performing under the specified norms but also acts as a conduit; funnelling the children who either display significant deviance from the specified age-based norm and/or those whose difficulties are not ameliorated through the resulting short-term remedial programs. These children then become subject to further Education Queensland identifying mechanisms, *Appraisement Intervention* and *Ascertainment Procedures*.

**Appraisement Intervention**

Children who are suspected of not performing to potential or are identified as falling significantly below age-based norms through the application of the early years testing regimens, the *Developmental Continua* and the *Year 2 Diagnostic Net*, become subject to *Appraisement Intervention* procedures (*Appraisement Intervention*, 2001). Appraisement is a school-based identification procedure used to assess children that are thought to have ‘learning difficulties’ or a ‘learning disability’ (*Ascertainment Procedures*, 2002, p.7). Appraisement, like the Developmental Continua involves observation, data collection, recording, classification and sorting of children into the different educational and discursive categories of ‘disability’ or ‘deficiency’. 
Education Queensland describes intervention as occurring “every time a teacher makes an adjustment within the teaching program to enhance a student’s learning” which should occur as an integral component of effective teaching (Appraisement Intervention, 2001, p.3). Students characterised as having learning difficulties are described by Education Queensland as “those children who experience persistent problems with literacy, numeracy and learning how to learn”, and children with learning disabilities as those “with long-term problems and high support needs due to the neurological basis of their difficulties” (Appraisement Intervention, 2001, p.5). To qualify for external support measures, such as assistance through a Support Teacher: Learning Difficulties or for teacher aide time, the child’s difficulties must be relatively severe and not reducible to behavioural factors.

**Ascertainment Procedures**

Education Queensland also defines (an)other group of children that has difficulty ‘accessing the curriculum’. According to the Education Queensland Ascertainment Procedures and Support Materials, July 2002, “ascertainment identifies students with disabilities resulting in implications for educational outcomes and occurs once a student has a confirmed written diagnosis of an impairment in a disability category recognized and defined by Education Queensland for ascertainment” (Education Queensland, 2002, p.4). These “recognised” categories are:

1. autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)
2. speech-language impairment (SLI)
3. intellectual impairment (IL)
4. hearing impairment (HI)
5. physical impairment (PI)
6. vision impairment (VI)

The disability category criteria in the Ascertainment Procedures are tightly specified. For example, to qualify as Speech/Language Impaired a child must present with a speech/language ability two standard deviations below the mean for his/her age and this difficulty must not be attributable to cognitive ability, socio-cultural factors, hearing, vision, intellectual or physical impairment, ESL or social/emotional factors (Guidelines for Speech-Language Impairment, 2003).

Currently under Ascertainment Procedures, ‘disability’ is graded into six levels from mild (level 1) to profound (level 6). For a child to be recognised as having an “ascertained disability” (Education Queensland, 2002, p.7), and thus be eligible for external professional resource allocation, such as ongoing speech-language therapy, they must be graded within levels 4-6.

The ‘Disabled’

However, in June of this year, The Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education (Students with Disabilities) identified this disability grading process as problematic when handing down their
final report to the Queensland Government. The Taskforce argued that “the resource allocation for student support through the Ascertainment process is seriously flawed and requires a more flexible approach to ensure that students and their class teachers can access resources as needed” (Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education (Students with Disabilities), 2004, p.12).

The Taskforce recommended, “that Ascertainment, as a process for the allocation of resources, be phased out by 2005 and that a new resource allocation methodology be developed” (p.7). The criticisms made of Ascertainment during the consultative process were that it was complex and time consuming, and that it did not support inclusive practices because it emphasised labelling and utilised an individual deficit approach, it was inflexible, the disability severity levels graded from level 1 to 6 failed to cover the full range of student needs and that the disability categories recognised were restrictive.

As a result, Education Queensland will launch EAP or the “Education Adjustment Program” in January next year, as a methodology to replace the Ascertainment procedure (EAP, 2004, p.21). The EAP apparently differs from Ascertainment in that it is “less complex, less time consuming, reduces labelling and supports the people working directly with a student with a disability to organise the most appropriate support” (EAP, 2004, p.21). It’s benefits are touted as the “discontinuation of Ascertainment levels, less work for school staff, reduced focus on applying for resources and increased emphasis on educational planning, increased capacity to work with parents and increased flexibility with resources” (EAP, 2004, p.20).

The Taskforce report also emphasised the need “to accelerate the transition, from a long tradition of compensatory educational approaches premised on a deficit view of the learner, to compensatory approaches that celebrate diversity and difference, as a basis for building responsive, collaborative, communities of learning” (Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education, 2004, p. 5).

However EAP, which is to be trialled during Term 4 of this year and implemented in January 2005, retains the restrictive disability categories, a two-tier (instead of 6 tier) support structure and reliance upon medical diagnosis and descriptions of impairment. EAP therefore, appears no more inclusive in practice than its predecessor, Ascertainment as much of the criticism directed towards Ascertainment has not been addressed through the development of EAP.
Incidentally, I have been unable to locate any literature that features a similar reconceptualisation of the Appraisement Process. Considering that the initial stages of Ascertainment proceeded for all students for whom it was suspected additional educational support may be needed (Education Queensland, 2002, p.7) and as such bound Appraisement procedures within its framework, one is left to ponder what examination the Appraisement process of identifying and classifying students with suspected learning difficulties/disabilities underwent, if at all.

What of the ‘particular Other’?

Although the dominant conceptualisation of ‘ADHD’ is that it is a neurological disorder affecting cognitive processes relating to processing speed, abstract thought, impulse control and short-term memory over which the child has no control; comprehensive research of Education Queensland policy documents and procedures indicates that Education Queensland does not recognise ‘ADHD’ or ‘behaviour disorder’ as either a ‘learning difficulty’ or ‘disability’ (Appraisement Intervention, 2001; Ascertainment Procedures, 2002; Students with Disabilities, 1996; Defining Students with Disabilities, 2001; EAP, 2004; EQ Inclusive Education WebPage, 2004; Year 2 Diagnostic Net, 1998).

Interestingly, nor does Education Queensland discuss ‘ADHD’ and child behaviour within the rhetoric espousing Queensland’s ‘inclusive’ education initiatives. Since the diagnostic rate of ‘ADHD’ rate has increased dramatically over the past decade, one would assume that pedagogical engagement with this phenomenon would feature prominently in departmental literature that speaks to innovation in pedagogical delivery, tolerance of difference and the principals of inclusivity. Instead, discussion of behaviour, whether disruptive, disordered or disturbed, is reductively consolidated within behaviour management policy and programs (Hodges, 1990; SM- 06: Management of Behaviour in a Supportive School Environment, 2002; SM-16: School Disciplinary Absences, 1998).

Institutional demarcation of the categories “normal”, “disabled” and “learning disabled” inadvertently acts to stigmatise those children whose particular ‘difference’ does not fit within these parameters or might otherwise be described in ‘ADHD’ vernacular. Both Appraisement Intervention and Ascertainment Procedures seek to identify and disqualify difficulties relating to
attention, memory, processing speed, impulsivity, disruption, organization, compliance and self-direction, however, the location of these characteristics is also contingent upon the educational use of ‘deficit discourses’ in conceptualising a child’s abilities and difficulties.

Whilst Education Queensland policy mechanisms are actively constructing “recognised” (Education Queensland, 2002, p.4) ‘disability’ and ‘learning difficulty/disability’ categories in order to appropriate ‘special needs’ funding and resources; an *incidental* category of 'abnormality' is also constructed by virtue of these normalising identification processes. That is, a category of ‘behaviour disorderedness’ that is not *explicitly* identified through its recognition as either an 'ascertainable disability' or an 'appraisable learning difficulty/disability' appears to be constructed as a consequence of normalising identification and classification processes and categorising, developmental discourses.

**Those who fall ‘Outside’…**

Describing children using discourses that refer to their ‘attentional difficulties’, ‘distractibility’, ‘restlessness’, ‘impulsivity’ and ‘lack of concentration’ has powerful and dangerous effects. ‘ADHD’ has come to signify not only the clinical diagnosis of a psychiatric disorder classified
within the *DSM-IV-TR*, but the diagnostic vernacular has permeated social and educational discourses to the point that it is hard to describe or conceptualise children’s classroom mis/behaviour (Danforth & Navarro, 2001) in a way that *does not* invoke these dangerous categorising discourses. As Glass & Wegar elucidate in their study of teacher perceptions of the incidence of ADHD, individual interpretation of ‘ADHD’ characteristics in schoolchildren is highly subjective and can be influenced by external factors such as class size and teaching philosophy (Glass & Wegar, 2000).

It is highly problematic that Education Queensland endeavours to be inclusive of students with disabilities and learning disabilities, students for whom the methodological and schematic arrangements of traditional schooling are inappropriate but resists a similarly inclusive understanding of students who may find the traditional schooling practices and ecology similarly alienating and disenfranchising. Instead students who may display disruptive behaviour because traditional pedagogical practices perhaps do not ‘speak to them’ are removed to “alternative education programs and settings for students who have difficulty in conventional school and disciplinary structures” (*QSE-2010*, 1999/2000, p.16).

Educational use of deficit discourses in describing children is highly problematic because certain words, such as hyperactive, impulsive and inattentive invoke particular associations with ‘ADHD’ diagnostic criteria. As this particular ‘difference’ does not fit within the narrowly defined, institutionally recognised and supported categories of ‘disability’ or ‘learning disability’, resulting in disqualification of learning support eligibility and exclusionary ‘management’ practices, these children become defined as ‘Other’ in a very particular, isolating way.
REFERENCES


