**Title:** Controlling or guiding students – what’s the difference? A critique of approaches to classroom discipline

**Author:** Zsuzsa Millei

The University of Notre Dame, Australia; Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia

**1. Introduction**

An approach to classroom discipline is a collection of theoretical ideas, teaching strategies and techniques utilized for the maintenance of classroom (school) order or “institutional equilibrium” (Raby, 2005; Slee, 1995,p. 73). Various approaches to classroom discipline constitute the notion of ‘discipline’, ‘student’ and ‘teacher’ differently and invent diverse strategies and techniques.

Some academic observers group approaches to classroom discipline into three distinct groups: interventionist, non-interventionist and interactive (Charles, 1981; Edwards, 1993; Lovegrove & Lewis, 1991; Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986). This paper utilizes this grouping without the aim to review all particular theories that comprise each group. Critiques of particular discipline theories are often found in their respective field of behaviour management or educational psychology. They are formed around the central argument that classroom discipline controls and regulates children and it fails to provide them with the fundamental freedom liberal societies entail for their members. Subsequently developed theories of classroom discipline deliver similar critiques about earlier theories and attempt to liberate children through inventing new understandings of ‘discipline’. They even go so far as wiping out the notion of ‘discipline’ from their vocabulary, such as guidance approaches do, because their theorists argue that the understanding of ‘discipline’ is attached to control.
The critique delivered in this paper departs from these critiques and draws on the notion of modern governance developed by Foucault (1979) and Rose (1996, 1999, 2000). Governmentality creates a critical distance that enables an examination of these approaches from a different perspective and from outside their respective fields. Government is exercised through power relations to shape individuals’ conduct. Wielding power in government is different from domination (Rose, 1999). In government, power relations ‘capacitate’ individuals and make them active so they can be governed through their freedom (Rose, 1999, p. 4). In contrast, classroom discipline approaches attempt to lift domination in order to liberate students. In this paper, I critique these approaches to discipline on the basis that they conceptualize power as domination, in dealing with disruption in the classroom. I demonstrate that if power is conceptualized differently, as it shapes individuals to be able to play a part in power’s operations (Rose & Miller, 1992), then the ‘liberation’ of students they claim to promote is a ‘deepening’ control rather than a release of control over children.

This paper contributes to a small number of critiques that have emerged from outside the field. For example, school discipline is understood from a curriculum perspective in Slee’s (1988) collection of texts. Branson and Miller (1991) critique the three different approaches to classroom discipline from a poststructuralist standpoint. Using the same paradigm, Laws and Davies (2000) deconstruct school discipline, demonstrate its constitutive force and offer an alternative reading of discipline. Raby (2005) uses the concept of governmentality (Foucault, 1979) to examine school codes of conducts as sites of knowledge production that fashion particular gendered citizens. Meadmore and Symes (1996) study school uniform as it is underpinned by notions of discipline. There are also assessments of classroom discipline policies (for example Izard & Evans, 1996; Slee, 1997 in the Australian context). Critiques of particular
theories are great in number. These, however, use the framework of other classroom
discipline theories for evaluation (Gartrell, 1998; A. Gordon & Browne, 1996; F.
Jones, 1987a; Knight, 1991; Kohn, 1996; Lovegrove & Lewis, 1991; Porter, 2003;
Rodd, 1996)

2. Governmentality

Government is an “amalgamation or circulation of diverse ideas or discursive
linguistic ‘texts’ that govern and construct identities, conduct, and the ways in which
reality is experienced” (Bloch, Holmlund, Moqvist & Popkewitz, 2003, p. 7).
Government also has a moral sense, meaning how to conduct oneself appropriately to
one’s situation. Thus, government embraces the control of someone’s behaviour,
passion or instinct and it also delivers principles for the self-formation of its subjects
(Rose, 1999). Government utilizes certain knowledges about individuals in their
government. These knowledges are delivered by the human sciences (disciplines). For
example, educational psychology produces discourses of discipline approaches.

Knowledge is always enmeshed in relations of power because it is applied to
the regulation of social conduct and is implicated in the questions of whether and in
what situations knowledge is to be applied or not (Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1980a).
Power, discourse and truth, in this way, go hand in hand as they form ‘regimes of
truth’ (Foucault, 1980a). Discourses of discipline approaches provide possible ways to
talk about disruption and assign certain ways to behave in the classroom. They
constitute ‘the student’ as their subject and govern how it is possible to act towards
students and how students govern themselves. Power, wielded by knowledge, is
applied primarily to the body. Discourses, according to different discursive fields,
constitute the body and its capacities. Particular discursive fields divide, classify and
inscribe the body differently in their respective ‘regimes of truth’. This paper explores how each group of discipline approaches produce particular discursive fields that invent specific conduct and human capacities of students to enable their government.

Governmentality can be understood in three ways following Foucault’s (1979) original early work. This paper utilizes the first, which understands governmentality as a special form of power that regulates the population and individuals through a collection of “institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, … calculation and tactics” of which classroom discipline approaches form a part (Foucault, 1979, p.20). Governmentality entails that there should be a ‘rationality’ to government – governmental rationality – which means clear, systematic and explicit thinking about how things are and how they ought to be (Dean, 1999). Rationalities are underpinned by coherent systems of thought according to a value of truth (Foucault, 1979; Rose, 1999). Forms of thought or rationalities are employed in practices of governing that give rise to specific forms of truth and ‘regimes of practices’ assembled in discursive fields. ‘Regimes of practices’ are historically constituted assemblages through which certain things are done, such as the education or care of children or the disciplining of students (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991). Therefore, this paper conceptualizes classroom discipline as a ‘regime of practices’.

Governmental rationalities have three forms. Rose & Miller (1992) summarize that they are “morally coloured, grounded upon knowledge, and made thinkable through language” (p.179). The moral form defines the means and ends of government and considers the ideologies to which government should be directed, such as freedom, self-discipline, responsibility and so forth. Their ‘epistemological’ form describes the nature of objects to be governed, such as conduct in the classroom, including some accounts of the persons over whom government is to be exercised. In
their third form, governmental rationalities utilize the “translation mechanism” of language (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 6). It is through linguistic translations that objects, such as the notions of ‘student’, ‘discipline’ and ‘disciplining’, are rendered into a particular discursive format inscribed with the rationality and made amenable to intervention and regulation.

Liberalism has a special place in defining the rationality of government. Liberalism is discussed in governmentality studies as a rational way of doing things and not as a theory or ideology of individual freedom (Barry, Osborne & Rose, 1996; Burchell, 1996; Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1994; Rose, 1996, 1999). Liberalism, according to this idea, “is described as a particular way in which the activity of government has been made both thinkable and practicable as an art” (Burchell, 1996, p.21). There are various forms of liberalisms that do not follow each other in succession. Rather, they are becoming more complex by wielding, and mixing with, new forms power, truths and techniques. Different forms of liberalism, with their particular rationalities, divide the body differently and construct particular capacities of individuals at which government is aimed (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1994; Rose, 1996, 1999).

Liberalism manifested itself in particular forms termed ‘classical’, ‘social’ and ‘advanced’ liberalism (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1996, 1999). ‘Classical’ liberalism produced subjects who could govern themselves and be responsible for themselves, who could be ‘naturally free’, moral and ‘civilized’ citizens. Scientific knowledges and practices inscribed with this rationality attempted to fulfil governmental aims to lift overt domination from over citizens to enable liberty and at the same time, to make them self-governing citizens (Burchell, C. Gordon &Miller, 1991). The rationality of interventionist approaches is isomorphous to that of ‘classical’
liberalism. Interventionist approaches strive to lift domination and ‘internalize’ (Kohn, 1996) control into students in the form of self-discipline. These approaches make students responsible for their conduct through the administration of consequences, and govern them to self-discipline themselves.

In ‘social’ liberalism, new forms of responsibility and obligations took shape (Rose, 1996). Citizenship was reconstituted in a way that political subjects had “rights to social protection and social education in return for duties of social obligation and social responsibility” (Rose, 1996, p.49). According to these discourses citizens were obliged to conform to social norms and as obligated to one another (Rose, 1996). Discourses of interactive approaches inscribed with this rationality utilize the notion of ‘democracy’ and promote strong belonging of students to a group. Moreover, they invent duties and responsibilities to and for this group, to govern students to abide classroom rules without overt control.

The third form of liberalism, ‘advanced liberalism’, is a reinvention of the ideas of ‘classical’ liberalism. Morality is reconstructed in two ways: first, as self-government according to external moral codes embedded in ideas of human nature, such as honesty, responsibility and so on. Recently these moral standards are increasingly defined in codes of conduct or value statements. Second, it is reconstructed in the form of ethics, that is, the self-crafting of one’s existence (Rose, 2000). Non-interventionist approaches constitute students as responsible for their own reality, that is, for the decisions to behave in particular ways and for the consequences those behaviours bring. Individuals, according to this rationality, are “seeking to fulfil themselves within a variety of micro-domains”, such as schools or communities (Rose, 1996, p.57, original emphasis). The conduct of the student, therefore, is understood as a way of existence or ‘an art of living’ (Rose, 1999) that the student
shapes herself according to available discourses through choices between possible subject positions.

While the mode of self-government as shaped by a certain morality was more significant in ‘social’ liberalism, in ‘advanced liberalism’ there was a shift to the dominance of self-government through ethics (Rose, 1999). The new politics of behaviour in ‘advanced liberalism’ governs through the ethics of the self, thus called ‘ethopolitics’ (Rose, 1999, 2000). ‘Ethopolitics’ aims at the “values, beliefs, [and] sentiments thought to underpin the techniques of responsible self-government, and the management of one’s obligations to others” (Rose, 2000, p.1399). The thinking and practices promoted by non-interactive approaches to discipline can be aligned with this mode of government. Students are governed by their values and through ways that makes them active to shape their existence through these approaches. They are governed by their voluntary compliance to the norms and rules as their assumedly free choice.

After laying down the conceptual framework of this paper and aligning each group of classroom discipline approaches to different modes of governing individuals, I provide a short genealogy of discipline approaches and how they made the deepening levels of government possible through classroom discipline approaches.

3. A short genealogy of discipline approaches

After the Second World War, teachers’ domination from over students was subsequently removed at least three interconnected ways. First, physical coercion was made illegal and to replace those, new forms of discipline approaches were developed (Slee, 1995). Second, new forms of pedagogies were invented, such as student-centred, cooperative or interactive pedagogies, to avoid the adverse affects that were
produced presumably by teacher-centered autocratic teaching. Totalitarian regimes of
Nazism or Stalinism with their gross human rights violations contributed also to this
shift in pedagogies. Third, progressive pedagogies of the 1920-30s, such as that of
Holmes (1911, 1913), made students’ ‘freer’ in the classroom. Greater freedom
enabled the demonstration of students’ greater self-discipline and consequently,
teachers allowed greater self-determination in a circular fashion.

Students’ greater freedom in the classroom, however, was coupled with the
invention of a whole host of strategies to shape and manage students’ conduct in
desirable ways. While the discipline approaches developed initially were based on the
tenets of behavioural conditioning and targeted their subjects’ behaviours and self-
government primarily, recently developed discipline approaches, based on guidance
principles, are aimed at their subjects’ values, self-understanding, self-formation and
ways of existence (Rose, 1999). Thus, and with great generalisations, while students
were regulated through the sovereign power of the teacher who taught right morals
and habits to them (K. Jones & Williamson, 1979), today, classroom discipline works
a presumably more humane way that enables the freedom of students. ‘Freedom’, in
this way, was linked to a deeper level of regulation and self-regulation (Rose, 1999).

Extending this idea further, the understanding of ‘self-discipline’ was also
transformed with the changing mode of government. For example, Skinner’s (1968)
behaviour conditioning strategies teach the students to self-regulate their behaviour in
the classroom. In this understanding, ‘discipline’ is mechanistic, its target is the
behaviour of the individual. More recently, popular guidance approaches inscribed
‘self-discipline’ in discourses of temperament, relationship, belonging and ethics
(Rose, 1999). Discourses of guidance approaches inscribe students with certain
capacities, such as self-reflection or flexibility, and teach skills with which students
can understand (for example, perspective taking or verbalization of feelings), express and self-regulate their feelings, dispositions, attitudes and relations. Through these discourses they are governed to craft their friendships, to work in particular ways together, and to solve conflicts to fulfil external moral standards.

The next section of the paper describes the three approaches to discipline and demonstrates how particular classroom discipline approaches regulate individuals in different ways while at the same time seemingly providing them with greater ‘freedom’.

4. Government through classroom discipline approaches

Despite the fact that teachers usually utilize discipline approaches by combining them into actual practices, this paper utilizes a particular categorization of classroom discipline theories that divides them into three groups. By aligning these groups to particular modes of governing individuals I demonstrate that each classroom discipline approach utilizes a particular concept of freedom. In the following section, instead of attempting an exhaustive survey of classroom discipline approaches, I provide a brief discussion about the different ways of thinking about discipline that undergird the various approaches. I also demonstrate how students are regulated at a deepening level in the name of ‘teaching’ them self-discipline.

4.1. Interventionist approaches

Interventionist theories prescribe the close monitoring of students’ behaviour and, as their most important aspect, involve planning ahead of time to manage conduct in the classroom. If disruption takes place, it is tackled immediately through particular scheduled and rehearsed verbal or non-verbal responses of the teacher.
Teachers’ responses, understood as consequences, will either reinforce or punish the behaviour. Students’ responses to these consequences are observed, recorded and categorized, and corresponding to behavioural objectives, are further manipulated through repeated teachers’ responses. Thus, disruption in the classroom is governed by targeting students’ behaviours and, if necessary, new behaviours are formed through an effective, simple and scientific control mechanism (Slee, 1995). These strategies are teacher-centred approaches (Lewis, 1991) and utilize sovereign power to govern students’ habits.

Through interventionist theories, punishment (coercion) was translated (Miller & Rose, 1990) to a specific language utilizing newly invented notions of ‘stimulus’, ‘response’ and ‘logical consequences’, such as in Skinner’s (1968) theory. Thus, punishment or coercive regulation was ‘tamed’ (Slee, 1995) and a scientific method to teach students self-regulation was born. Therefore, overt domination was supported in these approaches with self-government that is aimed at the individual’s behaviour and also, with making students more responsible for their conduct.

Various interventionist theories, such as Dobson (1970), Canter and Canter (1976, 1992), F. Jones (1987a, 1987b) or W. Rogers (1991), aim at the behaviours and self-regulation of the student and subject students to training through certain practices. These are for example: establishing behaviour rules, giving out praise and rewards, the acknowledgement of good deeds, administering punishment in the form of ‘time-out’, trips to the principal, shadowing a teacher, or keeping the student in the classroom during free time and so on. Interventionist approaches turn the classroom and school into a space that is easy to oversee, thus constant surveillance is ensured (Millei, 2005). Self-discipline taught by this approach is a behavioural accommodation to external rules. Interventionist approaches made the student
responsible for the wellbeing of the class or school. The more self-disciplined students are, the less rules, consequences and surveillance are set up for them.

The way interventionist approaches think about the government of students in the classroom can be aligned with the rationality of ‘classical’ liberalism. The aim of government in ‘classical’ liberalism is to remove domination to liberate individuals, and at the same time, to maintain government in order to ensure morality (Rose, 1996). Thus, liberation is coupled with the ‘responsibilization’ of the individual and the constitution of the subject of government as a self-governing and self-determining individual (Rose, 1999). Through a translation mechanism ‘regulation’ was transformed into a covert way of domination through the application of disciplinary power (Hardt & Negri, 2001). Thus, the overt control of the teacher was turned into a deeper level of regulation that utilizes the self-regulation of individuals to self-discipline their behaviour.

4.2. Interactive approaches

Interactive approaches carry an outwardly democratic style to discipline. Two major discipline approaches belong under this category: Neo-Adlerian Theory, which relies on “Adlerian/Dreikursian interactionalist strategy” (Balson, 1991, p.23); and Control Theory, which presents a whole school approach to discipline devised by Glasser (1985, 1986).

There are two basic principles of individual psychology immanent in the Neo-Adlerian classroom discipline theory. First, there is a desire (fundamental need) in all humans to belong to a social group where the group is built on reciprocal relationships (interaction) to accommodate to each other. Second, this theory upholds that every action of the individual is rational, purposeful and “consistent with a chosen manner
of belonging … attention, power, revenge, or withdrawal” (Balson, 1991, p.28). Glasser (1985, 1986, 1992) adds that individuals decide about their needs without interfering with others or others’ needs.

The intention (motivation) behind the behaviour is the concern of the Neo-Adlerian discipline approach. Discipline, according to the theorists, should focus on to change the way the individual fulfils her intentions. It strives to help students to make ‘better’ decisions and for them to exhibit ‘appropriate’ behaviours in line with social values and norms (Balson, 1991). Therefore, the government of students shifts from their conduct to that of their motivation and intentions in interactive approaches.

Control theory conceptualizes disruption that is caused by a lack of sufficient relationship between the student and teacher. This relationship, according to Glasser (1986), is based on rapport that teaches the student to take responsibility for this relationship. Disruption also arises if schools leave students’ emotional needs unfulfilled or if they leave students unmotivated. These emotional needs are defined as love, power (need to control what happens to her), freedom (need of independence from others’ control) and fun (Glasser, 1986). Therefore, interactive discipline approaches govern students by making them responsible for their relationships and making them conscious of their needs and the fulfilment of those. Thus, they regulate students at a deeper level.

The teacher acts as a leader rather than as a boss. Her superiority is based on expertise rather than power (T. Gordon, 1974). The classroom order is kept through ‘reasonable’ but few rules (Glasser, 1992). The teacher passes onto students ‘mental tools’ to enable them to solve problems rationally and effectively by themselves in consideration of the others. Interactive approaches (Balson, 1991; Glasser, 1992) relate the theory of discipline to societal values of democracy. These values draw out
the rules of belonging to a social group and assign ‘appropriate behaviours’. The societal values are: mutual respect, student participation in decision-making, promotion of student self-discipline, freedom and responsibility (Balson, 1991; Dreikurs & Cassel, 1990; Glasser, 1992).

The mode of thinking of interactive approaches to classroom discipline is analogous to that of ‘social’ liberalism. Responsibility in ‘social’ liberalism is reconceptualized and is understood as social responsibility. Obligation is re-shaped as social solidarity. Individuals are governed by ‘social norms’ and their experiences and evaluations are constituted in a ‘social form’ (Rose, 1996, p.40, original emphasis). The subject of government in ‘social’ liberalism is, as Rose (1996) argues, “a subject of needs, attitudes and relationships, a subject who was to be embraced within, and governed through, a nexus of collective solidarities and dependencies” (p.40).

Interactive approaches invent new needs and capacities of the individual such as purposefulness or intention, belonging, motivation and social emotional needs (love, power, freedom, fun). Government is aimed at these capacities to form self-disciplined subjects. Students fashion their conduct according to social norms and values, in consideration of the needs of others. They are responsible for the wellbeing of the whole class or school and they serve common interests through their self-discipline. The government of students through interactive approaches shifted from the self-regulation of behaviour to the self-regulation of “needs, attitudes and relationships” (Rose, 1996, p.40).

4.3. Non-interventionist approaches

Non-interventionist approaches use a person-centred (Neville, 1991) or student-oriented model (Lewis, 1991) to classroom discipline where the teacher is the
facilitator. The earlier forms of these approaches are based purely on the ideas of Rogers (1969) and T. Gordon (1974), and use strategies employed in psychotherapy and counselling. Guidance approaches utilize these ideas, but also build on a mix of other ideas such as the constructivist ideas of Kamii (1982, 1984, 1991), DeVries and Kohlberg (1987), and DeVries and Zan (1994), or theories and techniques of conflict resolution (Gartrell, 1998).

Non-interventionist approaches, as argued by their supporters, transformed the aim of discipline approaches from getting students to comply to produce “morally sophisticated people who think for themselves and care about others” (Kohn, 1996, p.62). It is also claimed that non-interventionist approaches are more democratic (T. Gordon, 1974; Lewis, 1991; Neville, 1991; C. Rogers, 1969; Slee, 1995) than interactive or interventionist approaches. The teacher is a facilitator or guide, which provides her with an authoritarian, rather than an autocratic position. Students’ ways of understanding problems are respected and the negotiation between students, with the help of the facilitator, strives for an outcome to which all parties agree and for which they are responsible. Discourses of guidance approaches, however, if analysed in the framework provided by governmentality, produce autonomous and self-governing individuals and deliver principles for their self-government in the following ways.

Guidance approaches teach students to realize their interpersonal competencies and to learn negotiation skills to solve problems. These competencies and skills include for example self-control (Porter, 2003) and the practice of being reflexive and “perspective taking” (Kohn, 1996, p.113). The concept of ‘negotiation’ reflects democratic and humanistic ideals and calls for collaboration. Negotiation gained first a strong foothold in the family (Beck, 1997; Cunningham, 1995;
Vanderbroeck & Bouverne-De Bie, 2006) and became a dominant culture in schools as well (Vanderbroeck & Bouverne-De Bie, 2006). Negotiation (some use dialogue) gained a normative aspect in schools, particularly from the 1990s. The strong advocacy for student-centred and interactive teaching (for example Bredekamp, 1997 in early childhood education) and non-interventionist approaches to discipline (for example, Fields & Boesser, 1994; Gartrell, 1998; A. Gordon & Browne, 1996; Kohn, 1996, 1999; Porter, 2003) contributed also to its popularity. The spread of interactive approaches to classroom discipline also facilitated the wide use of negotiation techniques in schools, for example, with the introduction and subsequent popularity of counselling techniques in schools promoted by C. Rogers (1969) and T. Gordon (1974).

Through the technology of negotiation and problem solving, students are governed to engineer their own ethics and moral development and to govern those in line with prescribed values and norms. In guidance approaches, thus, the focus shifts from the habits of students to their ethics and morals. Through the technology of negotiation, students are mobilized to “become active participants in their own social and ethical development” (Kohn, 1996, p.77) by solving conflicts and disruption issues themselves. Thus, discourses of guidance approaches produce active, self-governing and autonomous individuals as subjects of ‘advanced liberal’ mode of government.

Non-interventionist approaches, through the technologies they employ, enable the individual to acquire knowledge about herself and to verbalize her thoughts. Gathering knowledge about the self and self-expression form part of what Foucault (1988) calls ‘technologies of the self’. ‘Technologies of the self’ are increasingly mobilized for the government of individuals in ‘advanced’ liberalism. Non-
interventionist approaches rely on these to govern students in the classroom through utilizing their self-discipline and to turn them into subjects of certain technologies they perform on themselves.

For example, non-interventionist approaches seek to “allay the problems, anxieties and uncertainties engendered” (p.87) in the complex conditions of the conflict and to assist individuals to understand themselves (Rose, 1999). Consequently, non-interventionist approaches target individuals at their personal emotions, attributes, values, and their self-mastery to express themselves. Moreover, they deliver certain knowledge according to which they are able to understand themselves and to build up their moral standards and ways of behaving in the classroom. In the process of dealing with disruption or conflict, students are required to reflect on their choices to learn their personal attributes leading to that decision and to make it as a project of self-improvement. Thus, through the guidance process, the student steers her conduct, emotions, values and morals in line with the learning community’s moral standards and preferred way of existence. Therefore, non-interventionist approaches shifted the government of individuals into a deeper level by targeting their “‘educated’ anxieties and aspirations” (Rose, 1999, p.88).

5. Discussion

In spite of their intentions, the gradually emerging new types of classroom discipline approaches, subsequently replaced outward punishment with more ‘sympathetic demeanours’ of control and with that expanded and deepened the regulation of students (Rose, 1989; Slee, 1995). Interventionist approaches ‘tamed’ the concept of punishment and, by the use of scientific discourses, translated this concept into rational consequences administered by the teacher. They turned tight
behavioural control over students into self-discipline aimed at students’ own conduct. Interactive approaches invoke a democratic discourse and appeal to social values and norms in the government of students. Although they claim to provide students with more liberty, by targeting their intentions, social emotional needs and relationships, they govern students at a deeper level than interventionist approaches do.

Discourses of non-interventionist approaches invested the external control and moral rules present in the previous approaches into the individual. Control was translated into increased self-government at the level of emotions and values. It was turned into a task that the individual could master and according to which she could craft her existence to fulfill particular ethics connected to the wellbeing of the community. These three approaches, therefore, subsequently invented new capacities of the individual for regulation and, as a result, created the conditions for a deepening level of government and ascribed subsequently new principles for self-government of students. Therefore, despite their intention to provide students with increased freedom and autonomy, they contribute to the increasing government of individuals.

This is not to say, however, that appealing to students’ morals and ethics should be dismissed as a new form of regulation and more subtle forms of control (Rose, 1999). The application of new forms of classroom practices utilizing students’ moral considerations and ethics have the potential to question, re-construct and reconsider discourses and practices in the classroom that maintain existing power relations. The question is, however, how to create an environment for students in which democratic relationships with students deliver practically more equitable relations in classrooms. One way I suggest, in agreement with numerous scholars in the field (such as Mouffe, 2000), is by keeping disciplinary practices open for continuous debate and authentic negotiation with students. To open up this external
moral field for debate, the broader discursive field, and more particularly, schools as communities, notions of ‘young persons’ and collaboration need to be re-thought and re-enacted.

Recent popular non-interventionist approaches to discipline institute new discourses and concepts in the classroom, such as ‘negotiation’ and ‘community’, and new ways of thinking about young individuals as “enriched and vibrant human beings” (Porter, 2003, p.8). Practices of negotiation and participation, however, are imbued with power (Cruikshank, 1994). Therefore, students’ participation in these debates is problematic since its possibility is framed on a ‘common’ morality that inculcates an uncontestable code of conduct that disables students’ participation and results in closure. Moreover, the discursive field of the school is conditioned by classroom or school rules, school and government policies, pedagogies and curriculum frameworks that are developed independently from students (Raby, 2005). The discursive field of the school produces possible subject positions for students as inferior, immoral, learner (lacking knowledge and skills), “changing human beings that we must educate” (Cannella, 1999, p.39), in-need-of-guidance and so on. This particular field, therefore, constructs students as ‘second-class members of community’ and excludes them from authentic collaborative efforts.

This contrast raises a series of questions of how these new concepts and discourses are understood in relation to the discursive field of the school. The questions are the following: What forms of membership does the concept of ‘community’ define for students in regards to their participation? More particularly, in what ways students’ participation in decisions is allowed that affect their lives, such as the development of school codes of conduct and the value standards of the school? Also, how open is the school for students to create plural and hybrid ways of
existence? How well do the understandings of ‘the young individual’ produced by non-interventionist approaches fit with the broader discursive field that constructs students as lacking independence, in the process of becoming and that locates them in an unequal social position with adults (Cannella, 1999; Kelly, 2003)? How do the understandings of ‘the child’ and ‘young person’ embedded in the broader discursive field fit with the one produced by collaborative negotiation, which requires certain capacities and skills that young humans are considered to be lacking?

References


