

# Discourse and power in development and education

MAIED

Theories Lecture 4

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# SESSION OVERVIEW

- Introducing Foucault
  - ❖ Discourse
  - ❖ Power/Knowledge
  - ❖ General theory of power
  - ❖ Disciplinary power
- Development discourse
- The Work of Education

# REVIEW - QUESTIONS / REFLECTIONS

- ▶ What comes to your mind when you see, hear or think about the 'Third World'?
- ▶ What are the main discourses through which you understand and identify the 'Third World' or the 'Global South'?
- ▶ How does modernisation theory construct 'developing' countries?
- ▶ In what ways do modern (i.e. Enlightenment) theories differ from poststructural theories of the subject?



Source:

<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us>

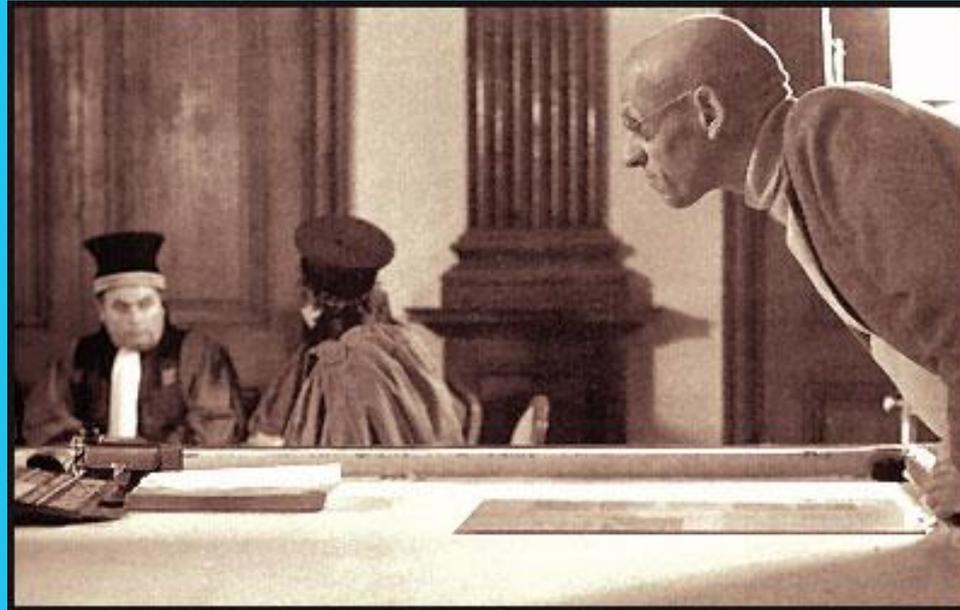


Source:

<http://www.actionaid.org.uk/>

# MICHEL FOUCAULT (1926 - 1984)

Discourse, Power and Subjectivity



Source: <http://www.michel-foucault.com/gallery/pictures/foucaulta28.html>

# WHAT IS A 'DISCOURSE'? –1

- **The creation of the topic, what can – and cannot – be said about a topic:**

*A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits other ways in which the topic can be constructed (Hall, 1992: 29).*

- **Includes language and practice**

- **Discourse produces the 'object of knowledge' and nothing that is meaningful exists outside discourse:**

*we must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would only have to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour (Foucault 1981: 67).*

# WHAT IS A 'DISCOURSE'? -2

- Discourses produce meaningful knowledge about a subject which influences social practices, and therefore has real consequences and effects
- **Regulation of discourse:**

in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality (Foucault, 1981: 52).
- Discourses are inextricably linked to institutions and to the *disciplines* that regularise and normalise the conduct of those who are brought within the sphere of those institutions.

# WHAT IS A 'DISCOURSE'? –3

- Discourses construct what is 'normal' and what is not
- An established discourse can be used selectively by all manner of groups, including those which it excludes
- A discourse is never be innocent?
  - It is implicated in power and a means through which power circulates

# DISCOURSE AND IDEOLOGY

- ▶ Similarity between discourse and 'ideology'
- ▶ Ideology: a set of statements or beliefs which produce knowledge that serves the interests of a particular group or class.
- ▶ Ideology is based on a distinction between *true* statements about the world (science) and *false* statements (ideology), and the belief that that facts about the world will enable us to distinguish between the two.
- ▶ Statements about the social, political, and moral world are rarely ever simply true or false; and 'the facts' do not enable us to decide definitively about their truth or falsehood
- ▶ Foucault's use of discourse side-steps this unresolved dilemma –deciding which statements are scientific/true and which are false/ideological.

# DISCOURSE AND RESISTANCE

- **Not all discourses have the same social power and authority:**

There is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourse: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and which vanish as soon as they have been pronounced; and ... those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again (Foucault 1981:57).

- **To have a social effect, a discourse must be at least in circulation**
- **Marginal discourses can offer a space from which dominant ones can be resisted:**

discourse can both be an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produce power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault 1978: 101)

- **Production of alternative discourses (Weedon 1987):**
  - i. Resistance to the dominant at the level of individual subject
  - ii. Winning individuals over to alternative discourse and gradually increasing their social power

# DISCOURSE AND SUBJECTIVITY -1

**Subject:** no independent consciousness or core, essential self; socially constructed.

*There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his [sic] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to (Foucault, 1982: 212).*

## **'Subjectivity':**

*the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of self and her ways of understanding her relation to the world (Weedon 1987: 32)*

## **Positioning and subject positions:**

- From a given subject position, only certain versions of the world make sense
- No unitary subject positioned uniquely; multiple and contradictory subject positions

# DISCOURSE AND SUBJECTIVITY -2

## Desire:

We desire to correctly constitute ourselves within the discourses available, and this may mean taking up “subject positions that no one would ever rationally choose” (Davies 2000: 74)

- Deconstruction makes visible the patterns of desire that have trapped us into particular ways of being and acting

## Agency:

- Subjectivity is the most effective when the individual identifies with the subject positions offered within a discourse with his/her interests.
- We can change positioning within discourses, but cannot be agents outside of the discourses that produce us.
- No free choice, but must choose from available discourses
- Freedom does not lie outside discourse, but in disrupting dominant discourses, and taking up unfamiliar ones.

# KNOWLEDGE/POWER

- **Knowledge described as a conjunction of power relations and information seeking:**

*'Knowledge and power are integrated with one another ... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power' (Foucault 1980: 52).*

- **Power imbalance produces knowledge:**

*'Indeed, one could argue that anthropological study has been largely based on the study of those who are politically and economically marginal in relation to a Western metropolis' (Mills, 2003: 69).*

- When power operates to enforce the 'truth' of a set of statements, the discursive formation produces **'regime' of truth.**

*Truth isn't outside power ... Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint ... And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish 'true' and 'false' statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; and the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980, 131).*

# POWER FOR FOUCAULT -1

## Power is diffused not concentrated

- **Power is dispersed rather than located in one particularly powerful and coercive institution:**

*But in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives (Foucault 1980: 39).*

- Interested in local forms of power and the way that they are negotiated
- *Moving from a micro (the local and individual) to the macro (general and global) level analysis of power, enables us to understand how technologies of power, over time, come to represent the interests of the dominant group and are incorporated into society (Foucault, 1980)*

# POWER FOR FOUCAULT -2

## Power is exercised not possessed

- Question not who has power, but rather **how power is exercised** between and among groups and individuals within society:

*'Of course we have to show who those in charge are ... But this is not the important issue., for we know perfectly well that even if we reach the point of designating exactly all those people, all those 'decision makers', we still do not really know why and how the decision was made, how it came to be accepted by everybody, and how is it that it hurts a particular category of person, etc.'* (Foucault 1988; cited in Paechter 2000: 18).

## Power is productive, not necessarily repressive

- It is also a productive set of relations from which subjectivity, agency, knowledge and action issue.

*'If power was anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we would manage to obey it?'* (Foucault, 1978: 36).

# POWER FOR FOUCAULT -3

## Circularity of power

- ‘everyone – the powerful and the powerless – is caught up, *though not on equal terms*, in power’s circulation’ (Hall, 2001: 340).

## Power and resistance

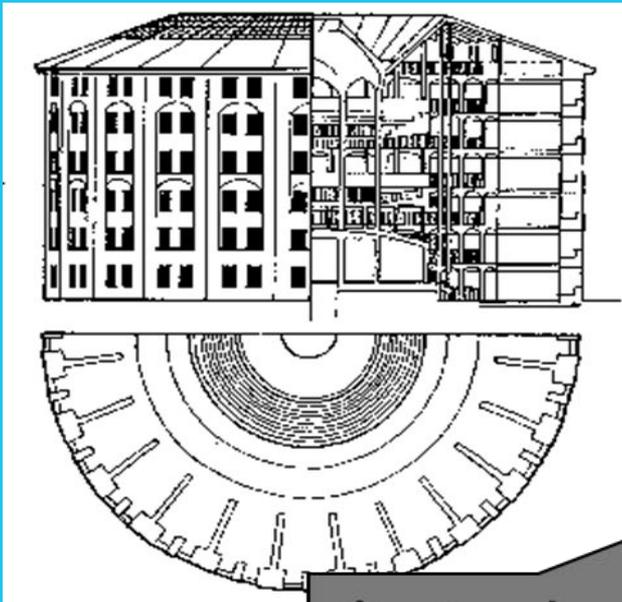
- ‘Where there is power there is resistance’ (Foucault, 1978: 95).

- Like power, resistance is to be found everywhere:

These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of Revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistance, each one of them a special case’ (Foucault, 1978: 95-96).

# DISCIPLINARY POWER -1

- Shifts analyses of power from the 'macro' realm of structures and ideologies to the 'micro' level of bodies
- Foucault uses the **'Panopticon'** as a metaphor for the operation of power and surveillance in contemporary society.



A circular building with the central control tower → control internalized.

# DISCIPLINARY POWER -2

- The emphasis on **processes** enable us to see that power can be inherent in structural mechanisms to the extent that it does not matter who operate them:

*“In [the Panopticon] you have the **system of surveillance**, which on the contrary involves very little expense. There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will lend by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself” (Foucault, 1980: 155) .*

Similarly, schools –power relations are deeply bound up with the disciplining of students’ bodies.

# DISCIPLINARY POWER -3

## Gaze:

Foucault uses the word to refer to the fact that it is not just the object of knowledge which is constructed but also the knower.

- *Integral to the concept of the 'Other': 'this means paradoxically, that without that which is denied, the Other, there can be no subject' (Paechter 1998: 6).*
- The gaze is a particular way of looking; it is detached dispassionate but powerful.
- *'The gaze contains within it a power/knowledge relation that confers, through its exercise, power to the gazer with respect to that which is gazed upon' (Paechter 1998: 9-10).*

# DISCIPLINARY POWER -4

**Normalisation:** of measures against which all are to be measured and all are to be evaluated and judged.

*'the perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalises'* (Foucault 1981: 183).

*'What is specific to the disciplinary penalty is non-observance, that which does not measure up to the rule, that departs from it. The whole indefinite domain of non-conforming is punishable'* (Foucault 1977: 178–179).

The history of **school** is one of normalization or the continual implementation of disciplinary power over children (Foucault: 1977:170–94).

**Examination, in particular, 'combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalising judgment. It is a normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It**

# ... AND DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSES

*More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve suffering of these people. ... I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. ... What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing. ... Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.*

[President Truman's Inaugural Address on 20th January 1949]

*without examining development as discourse we cannot understand the systematic ways in which the Western developed countries have been able to manage and control and, in many ways, even create the Third World politically, economically, sociologically and culturally (Escobar, 1984/85, page 384)*

# PRODUCING DEVELOPMENT

(ESCOBAR, 1984/85)

## 1. The Progressive incorporation of problems:

“underdevelopment”, “malnourished”, “illiterate”; formation of **a field of intervention of power**

## 2. The professionalisation of development:

proliferation of ‘technification’ allowed experts to recast political problems into the neutral realm of science;

consolidation of “development studies” in the universities of the developed world;

a field of controlling knowledge

## 3. The institutionalisation of development:

networks of new sites of power, resulting in the *dispersion of local centres of power*

# THE WORK OF EDUCATION -1

## School Curriculum as a governing strategy

- ▶ Curriculum as discursive product which arises from (gendered) power/knowledge relations.
- ▶ Curriculum as an act of Power

## School as site for the construction of subjectivity

- ▶ The classroom constructs a range of **subject positions** which are interwoven with the social relations of gender as well as categories such as age, ability, ethnic background, class etc

*... for young women who are engaging in mathematics, something that is discursively inscribed as masculine, while (understandably) being invested in producing themselves as female. I conclude by arguing that seeing 'doing mathematics' as 'doing masculinity' is a productive way of understanding why mathematics is so male dominated (Mendick 2005: 235).*

# THE WORK OF EDUCATION -2

- Schools simultaneously repress and produce subjectivities
- ▶ The role of the school in the creation of 'docile bodies' does not presuppose that children conform totally to adult norms

*“Take, for example, an educational institution: the disposal of its space, the meticulous regulations which govern its internal life, the different activities which are organized there, the diverse persons who live there or meet one another, each with his [sic] own function, his [sic] well-defined character—all these things constitute a block of capacity-communication-power. The activity which ensures apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behavior is developed there by means of a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the "value" of each person and of the levels of knowledge) and by the means of a whole series of power processes (en-closure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy)” (Foucault, 1982: 218-219)*

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