

THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELLING IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE 20TH CENTURY

FOREWORD: A FOUCAULDIAN APPROACH TO CRITICAL HISTORY, POWER AND THE SUBJECT

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In 'The Subject and Power' (1985: 208) Michel Foucault wrote, "My objective has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects". Tina Besley examines these in the practices of counselling, specifically school counselling in New Zealand in the 20th century. What Besley is elucidating here is a critical history of the terrain of counselling with particular attention to the identity, professionalisation and ethical self-regulation of school counselling, and the ways institutional policies and practices have been strategised in the counselling profession.

Through the discursive regularities of these practices the question of the needs of the human subject can be addressed. Foucault asks (1997: 88):

How was the subject established, at different moments and in different institutional contexts, as a possible, desirable, or even indispensable object of knowledge? How were the experience that one may have of oneself and the knowledge that one forms of oneself organised according to certain schemes?

This Monograph is a comprehensive investigation of school counselling, revealing past and present practices in a critical history of the present. From her PhD research (University of Auckland, 2000), Besley uses a Foucauldian approach in her analysis of the emergence and development of counselling in New Zealand schools, bringing attention to the changing political contexts of welfare and neoliberal economies and practices, the rise of New Public Management, deregulation and decentralisation, and the role of education in establishing a professional identity for guidance counselling in New Zealand. Foucault's poststructuralist approach to power, subjectivity and ethics informs her consideration of the establishment of a code of ethics as professional self-regulation.

Michel Foucault's analysis of discursive practices and the making of the modern disciplinary subject shows how knowledge and history may be considered in ways other than those which privilege truth, unity, continuity and the concretisation of humanist assumptions. Following Nietzsche, Foucault demonstrates an *archaeological* and *genealogical* method by which to map and analyse a past that is open to re-appraisal by present attitudes and conditions in order to explore the horizons of the present. Foucault's method is not to excavate a continuous chronology representing a linear and monumentalised history of ideas, but to emphasise the *systems of thought*, which "are the forms in which, during a given period of time, knowledges [*savoirs*] individualize, achieve an equilibrium, and enter into communication" (Foucault cited in Rabinow, 1997: xi). In 1970 Foucault named his Chair at the Collège de France, 'The History of Systems of Thought', and as Rabinow (1997: xi) explains, "Foucault divided his work on the history of systems of thought into three inter-related parts, the 're-examination of knowledge, the conditions of knowledge, and the knowing subject'". In his work of examining historical systems and

trends, Foucault "adopted an emphasis on concepts and epistemological rupture points" seeking "to work at the nexus where the history of practices met the history of concepts" (Rabinow, 1997: xii). By these means a critical history exposes the dominant narratives through which totalising accounts of history are visualised. Using Foucault and poststructuralist procedures a critical history raises questions about privileged assumptions of a norm in intellectual processes that relate to dominant ideals of progressive historicism, and the prioritisation of rationalist orders of discourse in the rise of the human sciences and modernist disciplinary practices. The notion of history as a progressive line of cause and effect, determined by some overall pattern of evolutionary force and teleological determinism is thus displaced.

The approach to the history of school counselling in this Monograph is one that acknowledges the need for a history of the present so that critical reflection might be possible. As Besley writes (2002: 4), "Without this kind of critical reflection the profession could easily become smug, self-serving and inward looking, ultimately bypassing or suppressing the interests of clients". Besley (2002: 4) cites Nikolas Rose (1998: 18) who asserts that critical history "enables us to think against the present, in the sense of exploring its horizons and its conditions of possibility. Its aim is not to predetermine judgement, but to make judgement possible". Besley adds, "It problematises what is thinkable and contests our assumptions and what we take for granted".

How can the past be accessed in order to map those conditions of possibility? Foucault (1990: 199) advocates the necessity to "provide oneself with a grid of analysis which makes possible an analytic of the relations of power". His methods, *archaeology* and *genealogy* provide the means by which this might be done. Genealogy references the relations of power within discursive practices of the archives that are excavated via the archaeological method. The term archaeology, used by Foucault (1994) is a means of exposing discursive practices and formulates the rules for such practice.

Honi Fern Haber (1994: 78-79, in Grierson, 2000: 7) writes of the way Foucault came to view his earlier "archaeological task of analyzing the internal logic of autonomous discourses as being inadequate because it did not place enough emphasis on the social practices and institutions in which such discussions were embedded". Thus Foucault replaced archaeology with genealogy in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. "The aim of genealogy is to uncover through their historical analysis the discontinuities (the moments at which social practices change), the ways in which individuals are constituted as subjects and objects of knowledge," explains Haber.

Referencing genealogical method in *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault defines genealogy (1981: 83):

What it really does is to entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledge against the claims of a unitary body of theory that would filter, hierarchise, and order them in the name of some true knowledge.

Haber (1994: 78-79): "Genealogy... problematizes truth; it problematizes the givens of our everyday existence by showing how those familiar, apparently actual or given objects of our experience... are objects produced in historically variable relations of power".

Foucault acknowledges the word *power* can lead to a number of misunderstandings. "When one speaks of *power*, people immediately think of a political structure, a government, a dominant social class, the master and the slave, and so on. I am not thinking of this at all when I speak of *relations of power*"

(Foucault, 1997: 291). Foucault shows how the subject is established through such relations of power. In human, amorous, economic and institutional relationships power is always present, says Foucault (291-292). Clearly counselling deals with the relations between professionals and subjects. In her paper, 'Foucault and the Turn to Narrative Therapy' (2002: 138) Besley writes:

Foucault's concept of power operates discursively at the micro-level to position us and our identities ... Power is not regarded as being solely possessed or exercised by individuals, but is part of what people negotiate in their everyday lives and social relationships where power is about 'positioning' in relation to discourse ... Understanding power in this way helps us to re-constitute the relationship between counsellor and client.

Power is identified by Foucault (1990: 199) as an "open, more-or-less coordinated (in the event, no doubt, ill coordinated) cluster of relations". Power, in its capillary action, is a *productive site* through which knowledge is exercised and transmitted, so where there is power there is knowledge, and where there is knowledge there is power. "If, following Foucault, knowledge is that which is produced by power's exercise, then attention to the exercise of power is called for..." (Grierson, 2000: 8).

In this Monograph, Besley points out that in counselling literature notions of power have been much overlooked. She uses Foucault's conceptions of *power-knowledge* as a way of understanding "the actions of a professional counselling association like NZAC, in terms of the power relations that constitute counselling and school counsellors" (Besley, 5.2, this text). She continues:

Thus, a Foucauldian approach to professionalism and professionalisation in counselling is two-edged. Not only does it question 'what is man?' and 'what is knowledge' in relation to counselling theory and practice, but it also turns the historical gaze back on counselling as a profession...

Through this process of reflection Foucauldian 'regimes of practice' are disclosed in both the profession as an institutional body and the profession's effects on clients, making visible the power-knowledge relationship. The individual is thus constituted, as Foucault (1980: 192) states, "as effect and object of power as effect and object of knowledge" (see Besley, 4.1, this text). Foucault takes up the question of *governmentality* of the (modern) subject in its relations with others. Applying this principle Besley continues (4.1):

...the school counselling profession can be understood as involving a form of disciplinary power with its own form of power-knowledge – a set of practices and techniques operating within schools that assist students to 'take care of the self' at best, but can impose a form of domination and control at worst.

So it follows in her Conclusion that Besley would advocate that as an ethical procedure school counselling needs to remain "radically self-reflective, with an impetus for change, experiment and challenge from within the profession". Besley reiterates "that guidance counsellors must reflect upon their practice, their ethics, and their professional identity and that this is a crucial task for any activity that involves support for others ... It needs to hold a mirror to itself as it examines the power relationships of the structures with which it is involved" (Conclusion, this text).

Foucault's thinking has been used to inspire and inform Besley's approach to a critical history of school counselling in New Zealand. Through this she achieves her aim of enabling "layers of accretions of the

professional self to be uncovered and exposed" (Besley, Introduction, this text). I am grateful to Tina Besley for making this material available as a Special Issue of *ACCESS Critical Perspectives on Communication, Cultural & Policy Studies* and trust that *ACCESS* readers will find the Foucauldian approach brings insights to the philosophical and political foundations of counselling as a profession. This Monograph has been in preparation for over a year and in my role as editor I have found the positioning of counselling in the Foucauldian 'systems of thought' a compelling way to access and understand the history of counselling in 20th century New Zealand.

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