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Becoming an Academic: Writing the self via Foucault

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> You see that's why I really work like a dog, and I worked like a dog all my life. I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation … This transformation of one's self by one's knowledge, one's practice is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting? (Foucault. (1997 [1983]: 131).

> I am an experimenter and not a theorist. I call a theorist someone who constructs a general system either deductive or analytical, and applies it to different fields in a uniform way. This isn't my case. I am an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before. (Foucault, 2000 [1980]: 240).

Foucault indicates several times that his personal and philosophical ideas are inextricably entwined (Foucault 1979, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1997a, 1997b, 2000). I developed ideas around "finding Foucault" in a chapter (Besley, 2012b), since his work clearly has philosophical, professional and personal aspects that impact on many writers, myself being no exception. My engagement with Foucault—in effect a narrative that is part of "reading" and "writing the self"—began many years ago. I first came across Foucault's work when I was completing my M.Ed. in counselling at University of Canterbury and attended a six-week course in 1989 at the Durham Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand. This course introduced me to narrative therapy as developed by Michael White and David Epston, which was based on some important Foucauldian ideas—especially those about power-knowledge, subjugated knowledges, and the Panopticon. In narrative therapy these translated into ways of decentering the therapist, "authorial knowledges" and the client re-authoring their story in the light of alternative stories and subjugated knowledges (Besley, 2002a). In my first book, *Counselling Youth*, I expressed that one important reason for using Foucault was:

> … because Foucault sets up a framework of critique that enables me to challenge some taken-for-granted practices in school counseling, in how we see or think of the young people who are the clients of school counseling, and in how we are constituted as school counseling professionals (Besley, 2002a: 2).

But this writing was well after my initial encounter with Foucault. In about 1998, after starting my PhD studies at University of Auckland, New Zealand, one of my two supervisors, Professor James D. Marshall told me that if I wanted to proceed with a thesis on the big picture of the emergence of school counselling in New Zealand, I should read Foucault and also Nikolas Rose's *Governing the Soul* (Rose, 1989). Like all good students of Jim's I did as I was told and submitted my PhD in late 2000 weeks before moving to Scotland and a position as Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow. Works by such writers became part of my transformation from a high school geography teacher and school counsellor as I moved into academia. The relative luxury of time in the new location meant that I had far more time to read, write and think and build on my knowledge of Foucault, such that by 2011, I had written and edited four books on his work: *Counseling Youth: Foucault, power and the*

ethics of subjectivity (Besley, 2002a); *Why Foucault? New Directions in Educational Research* (Peters & Besley, 2007), *Subjectivity & Truth: Foucault, education, and the culture of self* (Besley & Peters, 2007), and *Governmentality Studies in Education* (Peters, Besley, Olssen, Maurer & Weber, 2010). These book titles indicate that in my Foucauldian inspired work, my focus has been primarily on his later work and especially on his notion of subjectivity.

However, in becoming an academic, I have by no means limited myself to writing on Foucault and in fact at times I contemplate separation or divorce, but after a brief spell his ideas seems to creep back into my consciousness and his ideas may permeate another piece, like this one. My engagement in academia is much wider than just with Foucault, such that I would strongly resist any suggestion at being labelled a "Foucauldian", simply because sometimes I use his ideas. I have been fortunate to have had the freedom to publish wherever and on whatever my interests have led me (and sometimes where I have been lucky enough to be invited) so I have published books on *Assessing the Quality of Educational Research in Higher Education: International perspectives* (Besley, 2009) and with Michael A. Peters, *Building Knowledge Cultures: Education and development in the age of knowledge capitalism* (Peters & Besley, 2006). Other monographs, chapters and keynote presentations have focussed on poststructuralism, neoliberalism, and on youth and social media (Besley & Edwards, 2005; Besley, 2003, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Peters & Besley, 2008, 2011). My engagement in academic writing is not limited to my own self, but extends to forms of mentorship and assessment of others when it involves editorial work reviewing pappers on several journals. I have been on editorial board of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* since 2002 and an Associate Editor since 2010. I became co-editor of *E-Learning and Digital Media* in 2010. Being a editor for several book series with Peter Lang, Rowman and Littlefield and Sense Publishers extends my mentoring role for others in their academic writing.

I was engaged quite deeply with the counselling profession at one stage, not just as school consellor but as a member of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) since 1990. I was at one time on the Auckland branch committtee and was the local school counsellor representative. I was on the National Membership Committee, and have remained on the editorial board of the *New Zealand Journal of Counselling* since 2002. It was this professional association involvement that contributed to my interest in the professionalisation of counselling in New Zealand, which formed part of my PhD work and led to publication of the monograph, special issue of ACCESS Vol. 21, No. 2, *The Professionalisation of School Counselling in New Zealand in the 20th Century* (Besley, 2002b). It seemed important to trace the impetus for the establishment of school counselling in NZ and to trace how it had developed from the intial experimental positons that were established in 1959 through various changes in the twentieth century. Despite challenges along the way, especially from various stakeholders in the neoliberal environment, these remain important positions in NZ secondary schools in the twenty-first century. One thing that perturbed me then was that school counsellors who are members of NZAC (most are) uphold a code of ethics, whereas school teachers did not have such a requirement. The *New Zealand Teachers' Council, Code of Ethics for Registered Teachers (2004)* was developed only in 2003 and became a requirement for registered teachers and those with limited authtority to teach (see Teachers' Council website). It seems vitally important to me that teachers understand the very notion of ethics and ethical practice in their dealings with young people. Here is not the location for my critique of this document but in the light of some contemporary court cases of sexual abuse by male teachers in 2012 it may be time to review it, to be more than just "aspirational" and to clearly specify unacceptable practices in relation to students even though they are of course covered elsewhere in law.

Unlike in the USA, which has school counsellors in all levels of school education, New Zealand school counsellors are generally only in secondary schools. In New Zealand they are still able to focus primarily on the personal and social issues of young people, rather than on the academic aspects of student life on which their US counterparts are required to focus. In the USA it is the academic aspects associated with careers and college access and "guidance" lessons that would usually form part of the New Zealand Health Education curriculum that take precedence. In California, I found

that individual student planning sessions were an important part of the school counselor work with each counsellor assigned approximately 450 students. This planning was largely to enable and encourage students to access univerity education. More often than not many of the type of personal issues that New Zealand counsellors deal with would be referred on to a social worker or a psychologist, often because the school counsellor may not have had sufficient training in these areas, or time available, and being a litigious society it was safer to do this. The USA context meant that it was important that counselors carried personal indemnity insurance too. A move in the 2000s has seen the fairly wide adoption of the ASCA framework of school counselling once it was supported by the American School Counseling Asociation as the national model (Hatch & Bowers, 2005; American School Counseling Association website). ASCA and the American Counseling Association (ACA) are separate associations and ACA has school counselor members (I am a former ACA member). ACA holds some areas of serious criticism and disagreement as detailed in input into 2012 revisions of the ASCA model where ACA "praises the model for advancing school counseling but disagrees with its tenet that providing individual counseling is an inappropriate activity for school counselors. The ACA letter also encourages the ASCA National Model to have a greater focus on serving diverse, underserved, and high needs students" (American Counseling Association, News Release). This letter highlights some of the differences between the orientation in NZ and in USA school counseling in many schools today.

For for 2 years (2006-08) I was able to use my work in narrative therapy in my first position as tenured Professor (yes, in the NZ and UK status sense, not as in the USA where anyone who teaches seems to be called 'professor') in school counsellor education at State University of California San Bernardino (CSUSB) where we did not use the ASCA model. The students were very proud to be mostly first generation university students of Mexican heritage, doing their Masters degrees—something that meant a great deal to them. CSUSB provided a Master of Science (M.S.) in Counseling and Guidance designed to fulfill the California State requirements for counselling in grades K-12, which meant that students concurrently receive the M.S. and the California Pupil Personnel Services Credential (CPPSC). They of course have to pass criminal and TB screening as well as English and Maths tests before entry to the course. The course is accredited by California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) and by the National Council for Acreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

I have moved on from counselling to other areas of academia, not as a rejection of the discipline, but more as a result of what my academic position enabled, or allowed, according to departmental politics. I was not enagaged as a counsellor educator at the University of Glasgow, at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign (UIUC), nor now at University of Waikato. The former two did not have counselling departments, but I still was able to use some counselling and also Foucault's ideas in Glasgow in my teaching. In the UK, I became involved with the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling,* as book review's editor from 2003-06 and still remain on the International Advisory Board. Although UIUC had a "counseling psychology" division in the Educational Psychology department this was nothing like Foucauldian, so I was not welcome in there! Instead I was located as Research Professor in the department of Education Policy and Organizational Leadership and moved into Global Studies in Education from 2008-11 where I was able to use my work on youth cultures, the self and identities, e-learning and social media. The broad field of global studies, especially as expressed in interculturalism and openness has become my current interest and led me to setting up and becoming Director of the first Centre for Global Studies in Education in Australasia in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. The centre organises conferences, seminars, conducts scholarly research and will offer four masters level courses in this new specialisation from 2013. Work developed in a recent book, *Interculturalism, Education and Dialogue* (Besley & Peters, 2012) will be further developed in terms of intercultural philosophy and the philosophy of the city.

Education students often find Foucault's work hard to read at first, especially if they are unfamiliar with philosophical styles of writing. One thing that makes his ideas difficult to grasp is how he assigns wider and somewhat different meanings to familiar words, and does not provide

definitive concepts, but presents his ideas both in texts and in interviews which are often used by him to clarify ideas in his texts. I often suggest that a way of "finding Foucault" is for students to begin with *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977) as the clearest discussion he makes regarding educational institutions. Here he is concerned with the operation of disciplinary technologies of power and their relations to the emergence of knowledge in the form of new discourses, based around modes of objectification through which human beings become subjects. To contextualize, historicise and get an overview of what Foucault's thought before returning to his texts and back again, I suggest my students read biographies (e.g. Eribon, 1991; Halperin, 1997; Macey, 1995; Miller, 1993, O'Farrell, 2005); the secondary literature by his commentators (e.g. Gutting, 1994; Smart, 1994) and especially the interviews he gave (Foucault, 1989) and his seminars at Vermont & Berkeley (Foucault, 1988, 2001) and now the recently published series of Collège de France Lectures (Foucault, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010). This seems to encapsulate a Foucauldian attitude to education pedagogy. In the famous 1971 debate "On Human Nature" with Noam Chomsky (available via YouTube, or as online transcript) I draw student attention to the critical stance Foucault took towards the workings of institutions as Foucault asserted:

> The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them (Foucault, 1971).

Thus education students need to question the discourse of disciplines and institutions and their practices, especially with regard to schools. An institution and discourse that purports to help, improve, benefit people's lives, to be for their own good and for the good of society like education requires careful evaluation. Although little of Foucault's work was written explicitly about education or schools, and he certainly does not offer solutions for problems in education, but what he does provide is

> a devastating critique of the subtle and complex power relations that pervade educational institutions, which shape our identity, and which make us governable by masking the reality that our identities are being constituted. What he does provide is an alternative approach to social institutions and their accompanying practices which are themselves informed by the social sciences (Marshall, 1996: 216).

When speaking of the political, Foucault meant the vastly wider sense of power relations—a notion that at one point in his thought meant power-knowledge arther than how we so often conceive of politics in terms of political parties. In coining "governmentality"—a neologism for government rationality, he describes the twin set of relations between government and self-government (Foucault, 1979). Institutions and multiple discourses need to be analysed and critiqued in terms of power relations. Education and academia is influenced, deliberately or otherwise by myriad sources and in particular needs an awareness of the historico-cultural context one inhabits.

Education is a process of finding oneself. It involves multiple aspects, such as techniques, processes, questioning, thinking, discussing, critiquing, reflecting and writing the self. Sometimes in academic work it may seem like a never ending treadmill of publish or perish as neoliberal managerialist techniques such as research assessment exercises (PBRF in New Zealand) tend to govern one's professional work, writing (for the preferred SSI rated journals). These increasingly shape one's professional and personal identity and construction of self—as Foucault pithily says in the opening quote, "working like a dog" at times, yet it is a far more privileged job than maybe is appreciated especially when one considers how so many people work in repetitious minimum wage jobs (if at all in the current world economic crisis). Being paid through taxes in public universities means that as academics we must remain aware and respectful that our jobs are funded from the taxed work of ourselves and others. Education is centrally involved in the politics of subjectivity, in forming, shaping, and constituting the self. To take a Foucauldian approach would likely see a person's education involving self-mastery, not self-denial, in coming to know the self and to care for both self and others. Without intending it, my personal and professional self has changed and been

transformed to some extent by my readings of Foucault and of course other authors in my move to becoming an academic. I just don't know what I will be when I grow up!

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