Applying Foucault to Education[1]

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Though Foucault himself never wrote an extended history of the institution of education, he easily could have. Education, like the prison and sexuality, is fundamental in shaping modern western society and in its effects on subjects. Foucault refers to educational practices quite frequently in Discipline and Punish (DP)[2], pointing out similarities between penitential and educational practice. The aim of this paper is to draw out and explain some of the major theoretical insights that are useful in a Foucauldian analysis of educational institutions and practices. In particular, I will discuss observation and the Panopticon, the discipline and training of the body, including timetables, the creation of appropriate subjects and the organization of those subjects, the examination, and the creation of disciplinary knowledge based on the bodies of the educational subject [drawing from "Discourse on Language" (DL)][3]. I will conclude with a discussion of what sorts of investigations into education I might make using a Foucauldian analysis; in particular, I am interested in the phenomenon of standardized testing. Just as Foucault insisted that, since the prison is so inept at its stated goal of reforming prisoners, there must be some other goal, I focus not on education's stated goals, but on its often-implicit actual results. In both the prison and the school, power is inscribed on the bodies of subjects to create particular sorts of subjects and produce knowledge about those subjects.

Foucault discusses Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon as an ideal means of observation of prisoners. A round building with a central observation tower, the Panopticon allows constant and

[1] Prepared for, and with the guidance of, Elizabeth Grosz for a graduate seminar "Foucault and Feminism", Fall 2004, Rutgers University.

[2] Foucault, Michel. 1978 (1975). Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books.

[3] Foucault, Michel. 1972 (1970). "The Discourse on Language." In The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 215-237.

complete surveillance of every prisoner at every moment. Even more important than constant surveillance, however, is the *possibility*, or even probability, of such surveillance. The prisoner knows that, at any given moment, she might be observed. This possibility of surveillance ensures high degrees of compliance and docility; the prisoner feels completely *known* to the prison guard.

Most schools are not constructed literally as panopticons, though some are. School designs are, however, similar in many respects. The control of space and movement is a primary consideration in the architecture of schools. The principal's office and other administration are usually located centrally, where they can – figuratively if not literally – survey every classroom. Foucault claimed that surveillance "was integrated into the teaching relationship" (DP, 175) as "a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficacy" (DP, 176). That is, surveillance is not something that was simply added on to older models of educational practice, but forms an integral part of a new educational practice. Surveillance not only helps control and regulate the behavior of the students, but partially constitutes pedagogical practice and allows students to learn and retain more knowledge.

Central to the process of surveillance in the schools is the use of students as proxy observers. Certain students are drawn out from the class and given official titles and responsibilities; they help the teacher with mundane material tasks related to the classroom, but they also report back on other students' behaviors. For example, in my second grade classroom, certain students were assigned to the care of the class hamsters. They were responsible for keeping the cage clean and provided with food and water. As the designated hamster-caretakers, though, they kept a close eye on how other students interacted with the hamsters, and were quick to correct students' behaviors (e.g., "Don't pick it up like that!") and report the misbehaviors back to the teacher. Such student-observers exist in every classroom, at both formal and informal levels. British schools often have very formal positions for prefects; American schools replace

these with a number of more innocent-sounding positions (such as the hamster-caretaker, the attendance-taker, etc.) There are much more informal positions, too, for students who are not appointed by the teacher: these students are ‘teachers’ pets’ or ‘rats’. They take it upon themselves to observe and police their classmates, and are often highly disliked for it. From my own experience teaching, however, I know that running a classroom without the informal and formal student-observers can be impossible; the teacher cannot be everywhere at once, and must delegate some of the surveillance. In fact, students can be more successful and diligent in policing rules than teachers, especially because elementary school education coincides with a developmental stage at approximately 6-10 years when children learn the value of rules and often enforce them with a vengeance. It is important to remember, however, that students are not the only subjects being observed in the school; teachers are observed just as thoroughly by students, parents, other teachers, principals, and school district authorities.

A significant part of the surveillance of students is undertaken in order to account for the movements and activities of students. Thus, schools require teachers to take attendance in each of their classes and to report attendance records back to the administration. Students are required to attend class a certain number of days and hours in order to receive credit for classes. Technology in the schools facilitates such surveillance. Some schools, like some prisons, have begun using radio frequency identification (RFID) chips to track students’ movements. The chips are currently contained in plastic ID cards students wear around their necks (though the FDA this fall approved the physical implantation into humans of RFID chips for medical history purposes, RFIDs have long been implanted in family pets), and are ‘read’ by machines as students get on and off busses, and enter and leave the school building as well as individual classes. Schools can thus precisely and efficiently track the movements of a large number of students, ostensibly for the safety of the students (some schools have started to use these in response to community fears of abduction).

Surveillance is never absolute, however; according to Foucault, each time power makes an observation, a blind spot is also created. Power can never be everywhere, so resistance is always possible. As soon as the teacher turns her back, students can (and will) do almost anything, placing the teacher at the whim of the students for at least a moment. Increasingly sophisticated surveillance techniques, therefore, beget increasingly sophisticated techniques of resistance. School authorities have, of course, already thought of and precluded some of the possibilities of resistance; because any student – not just the intended one – can swipe any ID tag, the plastic cards have photo IDs on them that must be checked by a school official. But students are always more clever than institutional officials, so some will still discover ways to swap ID tags (whether by physically changing the photos on the cards, or by having another student pose for the original photo, or some other means). And, of course, if there is no observer, there is nothing to stop a student from swiping more than one card, or using un-observed entrances or exits in the school. Even if schools should decide, in the future, to implant RFID receptors into students' bodies, some students will discover ways of getting around undetected. And, of course, one major reason schools undertake surveillance of students is to prevent cheating on exams, and students are endlessly creative in developing new cheating mechanisms. Indeed, the moment there is a lapse in surveillance, resistance proliferates.

Another major theme in Foucault's work is that of the discipline and training of the body. Institutions regulate the movements both of the individual and collective social body. Part of this regulation occurs through surveillance, and it is certainly reinforced by surveillance. However, bodies themselves are trained in particular movements and ways of comportment. One of the first things children learn in school is what behaviors and activities are appropriate for different situations. In particular, students are trained to sit facing forward in individual desks arranged in lines perpendicular to the teacher. Countless hours are spent during kindergarten teaching students how to get into proper lines and move as a collective body in those lines. Students are

also taught rules about how and when to speak, about raising their hands for attention, and about waiting turns. In general, this training is achieved through constant practice and repetition. The ideal – but never completely realized – end result is a body that is docile and respectful, that shows deference to authority, and that can sit for a full school day on a hard seat.

This discipline cuts deep into subjects, and they rarely forget it. In their book Failing at Fairness, Sadker and Sadker tell a story about asking adults to role-play as middle-school students. Nearly invariably, the adults revert to the well-disciplined, trained subjects they learned to be in school. While Foucault himself does not discuss differentiations between subject bodies, a Foucauldian analysis could be made of the gender and class roles students learn in school. For example, Barrie Thorne described how boys and girls learn different behaviors in the classroom and, especially, at recess: boys are trained to play physically demanding, competitive sports while girls learn how to be quiet and play in small cooperative groups. Inside the classroom, bodies are gendered, raced, and classed, and trained differentially according to those categories.

Foucault does, however, discuss the physical training of students in other ways. His example was of handwriting (DP, 152). Institutions discipline bodies in order to make them efficient. Gaining efficiency in a task requires the imposition of a relationship between the task (gesture) and the body. Foucault describes in detail the "gymnastics" students must perform in order to produce acceptable handwriting. Efficiency further requires breaking the task down into constituent parts, into a "manoeuvre" (DP, 153). Foucault uses the example of a soldier learning to wield a gun, but the same process applies to children learning to wield pencils. The precise positioning of the fingers, the right amount of pressure, the loose but precise manipulation of the wrist and arm, and the coordination of these movements with the writing utensil and its movements – all these must be learned, practiced, and drilled by the students. As these skills develop, children must coordinate them with the making of letters on the page, mastering the right amount of pressure and the correct shapes and sizes of movement.

While power is always potentially able to inscribe students, students are also always potentially able to resist those inscriptions. Students can often find very small, below-the-radar ways of resisting their training, for example by holding their pencils in a slightly different way than they were taught, or by forming their numbers or letters slightly differently from the standard. Sometimes even seemingly trivial resistances are noticed and corrected; when I was in fourth grade I started making my 4's rounded, so they looked like a U with a long tail. I was quickly reprimanded by my teacher, lost points for that day's math assignment (she said she couldn't tell the difference between my 4's and my 9's), and learned how to make 4's with sharp angles. I was able to make other changes to my handwriting, though, without incident. An important further point, however, is that one can never resist (effectively) *until* one has learned the appropriate skills; I couldn't change my handwriting until I knew what my handwriting was 'supposed to' look like. Less trivially, e.g., students must learn reading, writing, and skills of critical analysis before they can make incisive critiques of their own school systems. Without the prior training, students likely would not be able to formulate the critiques, and certainly not express them in a manner that would gain the positive attention of school officials who could make changes. Resistance can *only* come from within.

For ease and efficiency of training, schools separate out skills (such as handwriting) into simple, individually-analyzable gestures. This process further allows the ranking of individuals by level and the assignment of individualized exercises for improvement. According to Foucault (DP, 159), this leads to a *temporal* ordering of subjects in relation to other subjects; one is 'ahead of' another, 'behind' a different one. Thus, "disciplinary time . . . was gradually imposed on pedagogical practice" (DP, 159), setting apart disciplinary time as different from other times, and arranging grade levels by the skills that were deemed appropriate to each level. A pedagogical hierarchy was created, dividing students up into more and more finely-differentiated units, and stretching those units out across time to form a progression through time. Students cannot, for

example, progress to 3rd grade until they have accomplished certain disciplinary actions (e.g., reading, writing, and calculating, but also interacting socially, at acceptable levels). This "seriation" (DP, 160) of time, according to Foucault, "makes possible a whole investment of duration by power: the possibility of a detailed control and a regular intervention (of differentiation, correction, punishment, elimination) in each moment of time." Power is able to intervene in very small ways, constantly, repeatedly, at every level. As power gets more finely tuned, it operates in even more minute and seemingly unobtrusive ways, so that subjects are not necessarily aware they being trained or disciplined (e.g., in extreme form, the sharply increasing use of medications to control students' behavior[4]). The individual's time and activities can thus be *accumulated* across time to produce a useful outcome (the trained body of the student). For Foucault, then, time is both "evolutive" and "cumulative", stable, linear, and oriented towards a terminal point, but also serial and progressive.

The breaking down of tasks into constituent parts, and analysis of students' performance on those tasks, also allows the seriation of time on smaller and smaller scales. Thus schools run on a strict and detailed daily timetable. Timetables, like the techniques of training and discipline, are aides for the control of activity. They require students to perform particular activities at particular points during the day and for particular durations; the result is the constitution, or at least the appearance, of *totally useful time*. Time spent during a particular activity must be well-used time, quality time. The timetable allows the division of student time according to subject matter, ensuring that students spend the appropriate amount of time working on appropriate activities. This is regulated not just by teachers but primarily by administrators and counselors, who check that students have been duly trained for a given number of hours in English, mathematics, and other subjects. Furthermore, the construction of the timetable is often symbolic

[4] Especially for ADD/ADHD, where prescriptions for drugs such as Ritalin have increased sharply – 500-600% in the past ten years, depending on whom you ask. Of course, Foucauldian critiques of these prescriptions proliferate on the internet. A general claim is that ADHD drugs mainly create *physical compliance*: "sit down, shut up, keep still, pay attention" (http://www.hyperactivekids.com/quicklinks/whatswrongwithritalin.html).

and arbitrary; students spend might spend 47 minutes in a period with a 6 minute passing period eight times during the day, broken by a 22 minute lunch. Thus time is broken up into smaller and smaller units, each still apparently useful (in fact, perhaps apparently *more* useful, due to the heightened emphasis on the potential use of each individual minute of the school day).

Along with constituting useful time, the timetable technique allows constant supervision of students, for students' movements should all be coordinated and 'lazy' or 'off-task' students are readily visible. Even recess is constituted as useful and supervised time; though students often feel unsupervised, they learn quickly that the teacher – or the student-observer – is always watching. The timetable allows all time to seem productive and efficient; students are constantly engaged in a pedagogical or surveillance activity (DP, 165), even if the pedagogical activity is more busy-work and repetitive drilling (i.e., training) than educational.

Even here, however, there are ways around the timetable for sufficiently resourceful students (and parents and teachers). Savvy students learn quickly, for example, which teachers will allow them to leave without a hall pass, or what to tell hall monitors about their activities. Teachers who understand that a particular student might get as much, educationally, from an out-of-school activity might bend the rules or fail to report an absence. In fact, teachers can manipulate the rules and exercise a great deal of resistance simply by looking the other way at key moments. Knowledgeable parents can also manipulate the rules of the timetable, arranging better schedules for their children or obtaining exemptions from particular class or time requirements. The more the individual knows about how the school works, the more she is able to maneuver around the rules and use them to her benefit.

The discipline and training of students in schools allows not only surveillance but also the production of appropriate and useful subjects. One important function of the school is to instill in students deference to authority and to train them in appropriate ways of comportment. As memorization – both of physical activities and facts – continues to dominate most education, the

discipline and training may well be a *more* important function than any stated functions of fostering critical thinking, etc. In fact, the skills students acquire through discipline in the school are central to becoming 'productive' participants in the labor force. Modern workers must know the timetable, for instance, and their bodies must be trained to respect the 8-hour, 5-day workweek. They must know how to work together in teams and how to be accountable to a manager or supervisor, who rewards or disciplines them according to the quality or level of their production. They must also know basic tasks such as reading, writing, and arithmetic; all of these skills are taught and trained in school. Furthermore, in the U.S., the school can be seen as training appropriate democratic citizens. These citizens also must be 'properly educated' – in reading but also basic American history and cultural values. A democratic society at least appears to function by majority rule, and therefore requires that a certain (apparently quite low) percentage of people vote. Subjects must be trained to do this too.

Just as the timetable differentiates movements so as to reconstitute them as more efficient, so does the institution differentiate, discipline, and organize subjects. The subject's body becomes interchangeable with other bodies – a functional reduction: "The soldier is above all a fragment of mobile space, before he is courage or honour" (DP, 164). Students are sorted based on their mastery of skills into different levels (grades), and then further divided within those grades among more finely-differentiated gradients – slow classes, honors classes, etc. This allows for closer supervision and more individualized discipline of each student; it also leads to the differentiation of several parallel 'tracks' within schools, for example the vocational versus the college-bound track in high schools, or even more specific subject-oriented tracks such as arts versus engineering within the college-bound track. The individualization begins from the earliest levels of school, often even before kindergarten, and extends through the end of formal education, whether that be high school or graduate degrees or somewhere in between.

Such differentiation allows power to work on individual bodies in the most efficient ways, because it allows individualizable and specific training and discipline. Differentiation also allows subjects to be arranged into "divisible segments" (DP, 163) analogous to military divisions. The classroom is a basic unit of the school. It is the location of educational practice and the venue of disciplinary work and training of students. The cellular arrangement of classrooms within the school highlights their interchangeability; any group of students can be placed within any classroom and training will function efficiently. The cellular arrangement also makes surveillance more efficient, as a means of locating bodies in space – teacher and students – and containing them for set durations.

The examination, according to Foucault, efficiently combines surveillance and normalizing judgment: "it establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them" (DP, 184). Further, the power relations inherent in the examination – the forces that mandate visibility of individuals and then differentiate them – also extract knowledge. Foucault discusses the rise of the examination in the context of the hospital, where physicians gradually took over the role of religious staff. As the examination of the patient became regularized, it could serve as the foundation for the compilation of medical knowledge and for the training of new physicians. Similarly, the examination became integrated regularly into the school – Foucault says the school itself became an "apparatus of uninterrupted examination" (DP, 186). Where students had previously competed against each other, examinations allowed the individual but simultaneous evaluation of each student in the school, and simultaneous comparisons of each student to all the others. Examinations were "woven into [the school] through a constantly repeated ritual of power" (DP, 186), allowing (forcing?) students to demonstrate the knowledge they had received from the teacher, but correspondingly constituting the students as the objects of knowledge of the teacher and each other. Examinations

were repeated regularly throughout the school year and covered all the subjects, ensuring the regular repetition of the power ritual.

An important function of the examination is to make each student *visible* to power as the object of power; as it does so, the power itself becomes *invisible*. Students see only the gaze of the instructor, not a visible or physical manifestation of power, but a power that "manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects" (DP, 187). Teachers wield the power to compare, organize, and administer. Furthermore, the examination and organization of students require documentation. An archive of reports and various other documents, pertaining to the student's performance, grades, aptitudes, and prospects, is developed on every student; this archive itself in turn helps to organize and regulate the student. The archives, too, constitute raw materials for knowledge, as the accumulation of documents aids classification, categorization, and normalization (DP, 190). A highly developed and integrated documentary system allows the further individualization of the subject and the comparison of the subject to others. A third function of the examination is to constitute each individual as a 'case', as – along with the archive of documentation – an analyzable object. The possibility of individual examination, once rare, is now ubiquitous (and typically unavoidable). Thus, through the mechanism of the exam, individuals are constituted "as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge" (DP, 192).

While the exam clearly extends power over students, it also extends *lateral control* over the students' families, their neighbors, and the community at large. The individualized documentation of the students both allows and requires detailed surveillance, and has the power to ask about the causes of the student's successes and failures. Foucault notes (DP, 211) that bad behavior of the student is a legitimate reason for the questioning of the parents and of the neighbors, thus extending the school's power of surveillance far outside the school proper. However, as Foucault argues about the Panopticon prison, an institution controls prisoners *and*

staff (DP, 250). In a school, the teacher-observers are *themselves* under constant surveillance, by administrators but also by parents, community members, and children.

The examination thus functions for the surveillance of individuals, but it has a second purpose in the normalization of those individuals. *Normalizing judgment*, for Foucault, is one of the major functions of disciplinary technique in general. It functions as a penal mechanism for behaviors outside the law, regulating minor and seemingly unimportant behaviors such as tardiness, lack of zeal, insolence, and lack of cleanliness (DP, 178). "It was a question both of making the slightest departures from correct behavior subject to punishment, and of giving a punitive function to the apparently indifferent elements of the disciplinary apparatus: so that, if necessary, everything might serve to punish the slightest thing; each subject find himself caught in a punishable, punishing universality" (DP, 178). Normalizing judgment thus extended the reach of power into the minute places of individuals' lives that law left untouched, by making *everything* – or almost everything – punishable. At the whim or necessity of the system, any given individual can be disciplined for failure to conform to correct behavior. Importantly, this required a change in the conception of behavior. Behavior could no longer be judged as either good or evil; it must instead fall somewhere along a continuum between good and bad. Disciplinary technique thus allows a continuum of punishment and reward, two mechanisms within the same system, which is able to adjust to the position of individuals in the system. Behavior – and discipline – can be minutely quantified, tallied and accounted, allowing past behavior to accrue to an individual's documented record and shaping the individual's future discipline. Discipline (again, either punishment or reward) is always, for Foucault, *corrective*: it applies further exercises to the individual in need of remediation[5]. Thus punishment is never merely punishment but the very means by which individuals will improve their standing and their behavior, "so much so that the corrective effect expected of it involves only incidentally

[5] Literally *re-mediation*: not just "the act or process of correcting a fault or deficiency" (American Heritage) but of bringing the individual back towards the middle, the norm.

expiation and repentance; it is obtained directly through the mechanics of a training" (DP, 180). It is no longer terribly necessary that an individual feel repentant about poor performance, but only that the individual set about correcting (through training) that poor performance in the future.

The scale of normality is clearly central to both normalizing judgment and the examination, the major techniques of a disciplinary society. Foucault sees normalizing power as having spread from the prison to most other institutions: "we are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social worker'-judge" (DP, 304), all of whom observe, diagnose, and correct the abnormal. The development of the 'normal distribution curve' around this time cannot have been coincidental to the growth of the discourse of normality. Though first proposed in 1733, the normal distribution curve (or bell curve) was only named as such around 1875[6]. It is now used to mark down individuals and describe their relationships to the mean and to the whole population on behavioral, psychological, and educational measures. The normal distribution curve assists in the ranking and classification of individuals. But, as Foucault notes (DP, 181), in the disciplinary system the *rank itself* becomes, to the individual, the reward or the punishment: classification in and of itself is the exercise of power and the application of discipline. This can be clearly seen with the use of the normal curve, where individuals (especially in terms of standardized test scores) are able to in effect rank themselves. They can see their position in the hierarchy at a glance, without a teacher-judge to place them in that rank. The operation of power thus becomes ever more invisible and efficient; it appears to individuals that they place themselves in the hierarchy, and individuals to some extent also *remediate themselves* – power need not force them into discipline because they seek it out.

Current educational practice continues to develop in the direction Foucault would have predicted. Used increasingly to normalize and train students, the school is a disciplinary

[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normal_distribution#History

institution. Take, for example, the system of exams required of New York City school children. Students have long been required to take a standardized exam in the 3rd grade (as well as other grades), but in 2003 the district began holding back students who did not pass the 3rd grade test. The exam allows the classification and categorization of students based on their efficiency and accuracy in demonstrating knowledge previously determined to be appropriate for their grade level. The standardization of the skills tested, and of the test itself, allows city-wide comparison and classification of students. Furthermore, the punishment for failing the test is *corrective* at several levels. Students who did not pass the test last spring were signed up for summer school to prepare them for a re-test later in the summer. Those who were still unable to pass the test a second time were required to repeat the third grade; they will again be tested at the end of the year, and expected to pass the test. So failing the test sets in motion a series of corrective disciplines designed to further train the student and develop the student's skills so that the student can move on to the next level. Finally, the rank achieved on the exam – moving on to the 4th grade or remaining in the 3rd – is itself the reward or punishment for performance. Parents might ground students or apply other retributive punishments, but the school as an institution applies only further training.

Of course, there are many reasons a student might be held back in the 3rd grade apart from the lack of demonstrated mastery of academic skills. Behavioral or psychological problems might prevent a student from performing as expected on the day of the test, or even from having acquired the necessary skills during the previous year. Students might also be held back for behavioral or psychological reasons *not* evidenced through the standardized test; schools extend their regulation of academic skills to peripheral concerns, thus also extending their field of control over other aspects of the students' (and their parents') lives. Institutions are able to 'train into' individuals behaviors that are expedient for the institutions – such as cleanliness, promptness, etc. – but which are largely irrelevant to the stated goals of the institution

(education), by exercising normalizing judgment over individuals and extending corrective training to those who do not measure up. This further has the effect of sorting individuals based on cultural values; unclean but prepared students, for example, are less likely to advance as quickly as clean prepared – or even clean unprepared – students.

Even in the New York City example, parents exercised resistance against the school's policy of retention. Many parents kept their children home from school on the day of the test in protest. Of course, not every parent was able to exercise this option; only a certain group of parents are financially able to spend a work day with their children. This example highlights the ambivalence of resistance, too. Students who missed school on the day of the test were allowed to take a makeup test, so the absence was entirely symbolic. These children participated in exactly the same institutional process as those who took the test on the original day. (It is unclear what happened to children who missed both the original and the makeup tests.) Even further, however, most of the protest against the 3rd grade test was about the appropriateness and precision of the *particular* test being given. There was no general outcry about the use of a hypothetical ideal standardized test to measure student mastery. One change that did result from the general protest was the allowance of an appeals process for children who failed the test. Teachers are now able to gather portfolios of student work and present them to principals and superintendents, who make a final decision about whether the student may be promoted to 4th grade. From a Foucauldian point of view, students were thereby reintegrated into institutional structures; they were evaluated by the various documents they had produced or that had been produced on them, instead of by their performance on the test – but they were still evaluated.

Some final theoretical points on the institution of the school come not from Discipline and Punish but from "The Discourse on Language". The school can be seen as exercising a number of the functions for the control of discourse. First, it exercises the will to truth by organizing and storing knowledge, and then selectively transmitting that organized knowledge to

the public. For example, schools mark out what properly belongs to different parts of knowledge; they divide knowledge into age-appropriate and grade-appropriate chunks, and then further divide those chunks into disciplinary subjects. The school has an authorized position as the appropriate institution through which knowledge can be transmitted, and is supported by meaningful social acknowledgements and rituals – e.g., a "high school diploma" is recognized as representing a particular, and generally agreed-upon, level of learning, and the graduation ceremony is a ritual commemorating the achievement of this level. The school proliferates educational experts who are authorized and certified by the institution to speak for it. Experts, for example, set learning goals for grade levels, develop standardized tests and curricula, and then evaluate students' performances on the tests. And though Foucault seems to restrict his category of the mad man to adults, I think a useful extension or parallel might be made to the child. Within the context of the school, children's knowledge is generally ignored, and what Foucault says of the mad man can be equally applied to the child: "his words were considered nul and void, without truth or significance, worthless as evidence, inadmissible in the authentification of acts or contracts" (DL, 217). Alternatively and increasingly, children – like the mad – are referred to experts such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and school counselors for analysis and interpretation. By either ignoring children's speech or submitting it to expert interpretation, the school is able to exercise power over discourse, defining knowledge as that which (certain) adults have access to and children do not.

Schools create knowledge as well as containing it. As Foucault noted that prisoners' bodies form the basis of a great deal of institutional and medical knowledge, so too do the bodies of students form educational and medical knowledge. The school obtains from students raw data to be used for medical, psychological, and educational reasons. This process is facilitated by the accumulation of incredible amounts of documentation on every individual student, including report cards, teacher evaluations, test scores, and extensive biographical knowledge about

students. This biographical and documentary knowledge can be used both to refine discipline for the individual students (DP 252), but can also be merged in a systematic way to create general knowledge and refine general disciplinary techniques. Such information helps, especially, in the creation of a norm; once a large number of students is described and accounted, standards based on those descriptions can be developed, and other students can easily be compared against the standards. The school thus produces knowledge by and from students, but as it defines appropriate material to be taught at particular grade levels, it also produces a body of knowledge about teaching and teachers. "The Normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education and the establishment of the *écoles normales* (teachers' training colleges)" (DP, 184). It is not only students who are controlled by the school, but also the teachers and the teachers' learning.

Finally, I want to conclude with some ideas of projects that might be done using a Foucauldian analysis of the educational institutions in the U.S. An obvious application is a history of the development of the school, parallel to Foucault's histories of the prison and sexuality. More specifically, one could conduct a detailed accounting of the training and discipline that goes on in schools. This would be especially interesting, I think, to investigate comparatively at different levels of schooling. Training is a fairly obvious part of education at the lower levels, when students' bodies are visibly trained to sit, line up, etc.; discipline is not as obvious at upper levels (high school, college, even graduate school).

However, I am most interested in analyzing standardized tests. Our school systems are relying increasingly on standardized tests, at local, state, and federal levels. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act requires standardized math and reading tests every year in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school, and science testing at least once each in elementary, middle, and high school. Most states tests high school students before allowing them to graduate, and most of those students go on to take standardized college admissions tests (e.g., the SAT or ACT). Many

individuals take further standardized tests for admission into graduate programs or for professional certification. As a whole, the U.S. population is getting more and more educated; nearly everyone has a high school diploma now, for example. The standardized tests are become more sophisticated, too; the SAT has been revised three times in the past twenty years, and state tests are revised even more frequently. And yet, every several years there are reports claiming that U.S. standards and educational achievement are falling in comparison to those of other developed countries. In other words, though the number and sophistication of our standardized tests have been increasing, the reported educational attainments of U.S. students are falling. It seems that testing is not in fact very good at producing the very thing it was designed to produce – so what are the actual products and underlying goals of the standardized test? Why are the tests so popular, and what *do* they accomplish that allows us or encourages us to keep them, to keep believing in them, and keep submitting ourselves and our children to them?

My tentative answer is that the institution of the school is primarily a sorting device; its (ideal, implicit) aim is to produce bodies differentiated by groups, to train them in particular ways for particular places in society. I mean by this that *some* schools do produce 'educated' individuals, individuals who are trained in particular ways of reading, writing, thinking, and behaving and who are therefore able to take on roles as, for example, CEOs, presidents, etc. But it also produces 'uneducated' individuals, who are trained just as precisely for other sorts of roles. Someone has to be the barber, the housecleaner, the cook. Furthermore, the school system would collapse if everyone were to actually go – or want to go, or be eligible to go – to college, so claims that schools make of preparing everyone equally for college are currently impractical, if not plainly dishonest. Many schools therefore train students *not* to go to college.

The school functions efficiently by its power mechanisms becoming invisible; individuals come to believe that they sort themselves, or that they are sorted by 'nature', instead of by an institution. This is facilitated by the disciplinary nature of the school; the power of the school is

revealed not in its ability to force students to do things, but in its ability to sort or arrange students in ways that the students themselves (and their parents and the community) think is logical or fair. I would argue that normalizing judgment, especially in terms of the standard distribution curve, is key in this respect. I can speak in particular about the SAT, for instance, which is scaled and scored explicitly on a standard distribution curve and is typically one of the single most important factors in decisions about college admissions. Students come to believe in the logic, fairness, and appropriateness of the SAT because of the emphasis placed upon it by educators, but also because they believe that the skills the SAT is purported to test are skills necessary for success in college – that it tests their 'true' abilities. Apart from their belief in the system – and certainly not all students (or parents or educators) do believe that the SAT is valuable – students are largely *required* by academic institutions to take the test before they can be considered as viable members of an academic community. (There are some choices: a large number of students take the ACT, another admissions test, and a handful of colleges don't require scores from either test. But those choices are extremely limited for students.) Once students take the test, their scores render them visible and legible to schools (which can then evaluate them) and place them as immediately comparable to any other student in the country who has taken the test.

In extending this paper, I would want to look more carefully at the processes by which standardize tests sort students differentially. My current knowledge tells me that differentiations are currently made along class, race, and gender lines, though I think it's more complicated than that. Furthermore, I would look for mechanisms that encourage students, parents, and educators to have confidence in the tests – to answer my questions above about why people like them and rely on them so much, and increasingly so. Finally, I think it is important to pay attention to how students, parents, and teachers exercise resistance to the tests, and how effective such resistance can be in changing or improving pedagogical practice.