

Interrogating discourse: the application of Foucault's methodological discussion to specific inquiry.

Authors

1. Joanna K Fadyl (corresponding author)

Person Centred Research Centre, Health and Rehabilitation Research Institute
AUT University, Private Bag 92006, Auckland, New Zealand

joanna.fadyl@aut.ac.nz

Phone: +64 9 921 9999 x7675

Fax: +64 9 921 9620

2. David A Nicholls

School of Rehabilitation and Occupation Studies,
AUT University, Private Bag 92006, Auckland, New Zealand

david.nicholls@aut.ac.nz

Phone: +64 9 921 9999 x7064

Fax: +64 9 921 9620

3. Kathryn M McPherson

Person Centred Research Centre, Health and Rehabilitation Research Institute
AUT University, Private Bag 92006, Auckland, New Zealand

kathryn.mcpherson@aut.ac.nz

Phone: +64 9 921 9999 x7110

Fax: +64 9 921 9620

This published version of this article is:

Fadyl, JK., Nicholls, D. A., & McPherson, KM. (2013). Interrogating discourse: The application of Foucault's methodological discussion to specific inquiry. *Health: an interdisciplinary journal for the social study of health, illness and medicine*, 17(5), 491-507. doi:[10.1177/1363459312464073](https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459312464073)

Abstract

Discourse analysis following the work of Michel Foucault has become a valuable methodology in the critical analysis of a broad range of topics relating to health. However, it can be a daunting task, in that there seems to be both a huge number of possible approaches to carrying out this type of project, and an abundance of different, often conflicting, opinions about what counts as 'Foucauldian'. This paper takes the position that methodological design should be informed by ongoing discussion, and applied as appropriate to a particular area of inquiry. The discussion given offers an interpretation and application of Foucault's methodological principles, integrating a reading of Foucault with applications of his work by other authors, showing how this is then applied to interrogate the practice of vocational rehabilitation. It is intended as a contribution to methodological discussion in this area, offering an interpretation of various methodological elements described by Foucault, alongside specific application of these aspects.

Introduction

The work of Michel Foucault (1926 - 1984) has become an important tool for researchers and practitioners who are committed to critical analysis of health and healthcare practice (Powers, 1996). Foucault himself developed and tested his ideas through analytic research, writing 'histories of the present', 'archaeologies' and 'genealogies' of our present knowledges. However, he never stipulated a set of guidelines that could be defined as his final and complete methodology, and like many thinkers, was committed to ongoing reconsideration and adaptation of his methodology to achieve the aims of his various projects.

I do not have a methodology that I apply in the same way to different domains. On the contrary, I would say that I try to isolate a single field of objects, a domain of objects, by using the instruments I can find or that I forge as I am actually doing my research, but without privileging the problem of methodology in any way. (Foucault, cited in Fontana and Bertani, 2003: 287-288)

It has been argued, therefore, that the key to robust research utilising Foucault is to apply his work as appropriate for the particular focus of inquiry, ensuring that the way it is used is demonstrated to have a coherent connection with his theoretical and philosophical aims and approaches (Hook, 2001; Nicholls, 2009). Foucault's ideas and research approaches have been taken up by a number of researchers in various applications, and correspondingly, contributions to methodological discussion in this field take on different (sometimes divergent) forms. Two methodological disciplines that have drawn heavily on Foucault's work and published guides to discourse analysis that take a Foucauldian position are critical discursive psychology (see discussion of applications in Parker, 2002; Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008) and Critical Discourse Analysis (see for example Jäger and Maier, 2009). The tendency to produce 'guides' for a particular discipline, however, has been critiqued, following the argument that the more instructive the discourse analysis guide, the greater their tendency to encourage too much of a focus on the specific texts being analysed, missing important elements of

the ways in which discourse operates beyond the apparent confines of these specific examples, and therefore losing much of what makes Foucault's analyses so significant and widely applicable (see Hook, 2001). In the process of producing a guide that can be applied to a range of projects, methodology necessarily needs to be defined and limited, and much of the idiosyncrasy, complexity and depth that characterised Foucault's projects can be lost. Furthermore, Hook (2001) points out that one of the key aspects of Foucault's position is that discourse is productive, and so any discourse analysis that claims to take a Foucauldian perspective should acknowledge not just what the discourse articulates, but what the effects of that discourse are — what discourse produces — be it actions, structures, social conditions, and so on. These products of discourse are often referred to in texts, and can be seen as outcomes of discourse, functioning as part of it and reproducing it. Therefore, embracing Foucault's philosophical and methodological approach, these aspects (often referred to as extra-discursive) should be a focus of analysis rather than an afterthought, or something merely referred to in the text. Yet this is something that is increasingly difficult to capture, the more prescriptive an analysis guideline becomes.

Another approach to Foucauldian discourse analysis which avoids some of these difficulties involves designing the study and adapting the methodology according to the particular research question, utilising philosophical and methodological writing and lectures by Foucault, and others who have followed his work, in order to employ a methodological approach and draw up a study design that is specific to addressing the topic and problem of interest. The rigour of these types of designs relies on their congruence with Foucault's philosophical and methodological aims, and appropriateness in terms of answering the research question, and they can be evaluated and critiqued based on these criteria. The difficulties that tend to be encountered in taking this approach relate to decisions about how to design and carry out a study in the context of having plenty of theoretical information, but little practical advice. In this spirit, recently researchers who have chosen to use this approach have published the ways in which they have interpreted and applied Foucault's methodological principles to their own

projects as a contribution to methodological discussion in this area (Graham, 2011; Nicholls, 2009; Tamboukou, 1999). This paper is intended to contribute to this growing body of literature by offering interpretations and applications of Foucault's methodological principles as they were applied to a study which drew on the concept of governmentality to analyse the conditions of possibility for recently emerging approaches to vocational rehabilitation in Aotearoa / New Zealand. In particular, the focus is on extending discussion of the principles outlined in Foucault's 1969 book, published in English in 1972 as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and his inaugural lecture given in 1970 at the Collège de France, published in English as *The Order of Discourse* in 1981, by integrating the information in them with aspects of his later lectures and essays, and with the work other authors who have extended and applied his theories. The purpose of doing this is to provide an example of how methodological interpretations and applications can be tailored according to specific theoretical focus, and extend the literature that explores the various ways in which Foucault's work can be applied to develop a methodology for a discourse analysis.

Many of Foucault's books, lectures and interviews are now available in English. These include archaeologies and genealogies (see section below for more on this), methodological discussion, and articulation of his philosophical position and the implications for analysis of contemporary problems. While the two key methodological works mentioned above have provided the basic outline and principles for the approach I describe in this paper, my methodological approach has also been informed by Foucault's books, lectures and essays. These provided both examples and more detailed discussion of particular points, which were used to make decisions about theoretical focus and practical application. Also crucial were publications from other researchers, in particular Tamboukou (1999), Nicholls (2009), and Graham (2011), who have written about their own experiences of applying his methods; Hook's (2001) close reading of *The Order of Discourse*; and Rose (1999) and Dean (1999) in their work about governmentality.

Archaeology and genealogy

The first task towards defining methodology is to look at how the research questions could be addressed using the methodological techniques described by Foucault, whose work is often described as having two periods. Foucault's works prior to *Discipline and Punish* (1977) focused on a concern with what he called in *The Order of Discourse* the 'critical section' of discourse analysis. (1981: 70). During this period, his main focus was to examine the history of a discourse in a way that sought to question the self-evidence of those things that appear to be inevitable 'truths'; reveal the ways in which discourse imposes restrictions on what can be thought, said and done; and show how the subject who 'speaks' discourse is constructed by it, rather than being its originator (1981: 66). Foucault's works during this period are often described as archaeologies (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). His works from *Discipline and Punish* (1977) until his death, often referred to as genealogies, are characterised by greater focus given to analyzing the relations of power and knowledge involved in producing and maintaining the discourses that comprise our reality (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). Foucault's work in the years just prior to his death is sometimes characterised as a distinct period, because of his shift in emphasis to ethics in the sense of the relation of the subject to themselves. For the purposes of application to my study, I saw this work as having an important theoretical contribution to the application of governmentality, which intersects with ethics (Foucault, 1988), but it did not distinctly contribute to methodological approach, and as such I have not separated this out. It has been argued that genealogy does not leave behind the techniques of archaeology but rather refines and adds to them (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983; Tamboukou, 1999). In his introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* (Foucault, 1992: 12), Foucault described archaeology and genealogy as 'dimensions of analysis', with archaeology working to allow identification and examination of discursive formations, and genealogy providing analysis of how these formations come about and operate through knowledge-power relations. In general terms, Foucault's genealogies investigated history to provide clues as to why our present discourses are as they are (and not otherwise); how we come to know ourselves and others as subjects of our

present discourses (for example the roles and identities that we take on); and the relations of power that produce and maintain our present discourses (Foucault, 1983a).

Drawing on these examples, and also Rose's (1999) description of genealogy, I chose to describe my own study as a genealogy of vocational rehabilitation in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In many societies in recent years, individuals' participation in work has been linked to health and wellbeing (for example see Australasian Faculty of Occupational & Environmental Medicine, 2010). Vocational rehabilitation can be described as "a process of compelling and enabling people to overcome disability so they can work" (Denny and Fady, 2012: 1), which involves many and sometimes diverse strategies and programmes to achieve this aim. The position I took as a starting point for the study was that vocational rehabilitation is a social practice that is historically and culturally situated and has effects: producing some things and constraining others. Using Foucault's work as a methodological and theoretical guide, my inquiry focused on what makes and keeps vocational rehabilitation intelligible and important in Aotearoa / New Zealand society, and what its (social and political) effects are. This involved looking to identify how vocational rehabilitation has been constructed historically; how we have come to define this notion, and to think, speak and act in certain ways with regard to it; and the various relations and techniques of power by which people come to know themselves as subjects of vocational rehabilitation, and which produce and maintain this as a notion which can be thought and acted upon.

Even within a Foucauldian position, a topic can be pursued from a number of different angles and theoretical orientations, and my focus on historical and cultural conditions of possibility, and techniques and relations of power, meant that genealogy was the methodological approach I chose for the study. As such, employing the idea of archaeology and genealogy as dimensions of analysis, I used archaeology as part of genealogy in my study. Methodological principles relating to archaeology were used to make visible the elements of discourse and discursive formations (objects, subjects, concepts and strategies), and the ways in which they are formed and limited. These

discourses were then analysed in relation to Foucault's notions of power-knowledge relations (disciplinary techniques, subjectivity, and governmentality), utilising methodological principles associated with genealogy, and theory developed by Foucault and extended by other authors. Firstly, I will outline how I drew on Foucault's discussion of discursive formations in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to guide the analysis of discourses in my texts. Following this, I will describe how I applied the principles discussed by Foucault in his lecture *The Order of Discourse* (1981) aided by other researchers' accounts of 'doing genealogy', Foucault's 1978 and 1979 lectures (Senellarat, 2007; Senellarat, 2008), and work on 'governmentality' by Dean (1999) and Rose (1999) in order to construct a methodological framework for my project.

Archaeology: examining discourse for its elements, processes and functions

Re-viewing the topic area: The 'statement' and the 'text'

In order to open up the topic to be studied in a way that make it amenable to analysis, I employed Foucault's (1972) concepts of the 'statement' and the 'text'. According to Foucault's description, the statement can be seen as the most basic element in discourse, and a text is comprised of statements. Statements are present everywhere, but cannot be described in and of themselves because they always rely on a field of relations which define how they function (Foucault, 1972). I found it helpful to consider that one can only 'state' something with implicit reference to a field of truth and knowledge which provides context and determines function, without this it is meaningless (Foucault, 1972). For example, to say 'I am disabled' is a different statement when trying to access services for disabled people, compared with applying for a job, despite the fact that it consists of the same words in the same order. The utterance 'I am disabled' is meaningless and functionless in itself without a field of relations. While statements are easiest to illustrate in the form of written or spoken language, this is not the only form they take, and the texts, which contain statements, may come in many forms, and refer to any means by which a statements are made. A

few examples that I encountered in my study were images (e.g. the image of a person in a wheelchair), other material objects (e.g. the wheelchair itself in its physical characteristics), and the arrangement of spaces (e.g. a modern, multiple-story corporate building with narrow doorways and no lift). These all communicate statements within a field of relations and therefore are regarded as texts (Foucault, 1972). Because texts contain statements and statements are the basic unit of discourse, texts make a logical starting point for a discourse analysis. In addition to helping me re-view the topic in a way that made it more amenable to analysis, considering what constitutes a text also helped me consider what texts would be most useful when it came to do my analysis.

‘Seeing’ discourse: looking at discursive formations

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault described four basic elements which are formed by discourse, or ‘discursive formations’ which, once we start to identify these and examine their rules of formation, begin to make more visible the way in which discourses ‘systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (1972: 49). These four elements are described as objects, enunciative modalities, concepts and strategies. Reading my texts with a focus on identifying the discursive formations and their relations served as the starting point for analysis.

Beginning with objects, we can say that through discourse, various objects are formed and rendered manifest such that we can think of, speak of, and act upon them. An example of an object from my study was ‘disability’. Foucault suggested that objects should be examined to uncover their surfaces of emergence, authorities of delimitation and grids of specification. Surfaces of emergence refers to the spaces and situations where an object emerges as ‘manifest, nameable and describable’, as visible, differentiated and describable in terms of what it is and isn’t (1972: 41). For the object ‘disability’, surfaces of emergence included the labour market and the doctor’s examination. Authorities of delimitation are the institutions, professions and similar which are the authorities within a society that establish and give importance to the objects of interest. From my analysis of texts from the early 20th century in New Zealand

society, two of the major authorities of delimitation for disability were the medical authorities and the job market. However, other authorities such as the Returned Soldiers' Association played an important part in the naming and describing of disability as well. Finally, grids of specification are the systems by which the object is broken down further into types or kinds, then compared with one another, classified, grouped or otherwise organised. Within physical disability, grids of specification might articulate how the different types of disability are classified and grouped by which body parts are affected, the number of body parts that are affected, or the extent to which a person's overall functioning in life is affected compared to a non-disabled counterpart. Foucault goes on to say that it is not enough just to define surfaces of emergence, authorities of delimitation and grids of specification. It is not these things themselves, but the relations between them that provide the most important information that will help the analyst to see how objects come to be formed. Thus, it is these relations that should be mapped and examined (1981). For my study, the relation between the surfaces of emergence of doctor's examination and workplace, and between the authority of medicine and specification of extent of disability according to the number of limbs affected, were two examples that I examined.

'Enunciative modalities' refer to the rights and qualifications that allow the author of a statement or text to speak, and those that allow what they say to be regarded as reasonable and true. Also, the positions and spaces that give a statement's author their legitimacy, and the various subject positions in relation to domains or groups of objects the discourse makes it possible to occupy (1981). I found Foucault's later discussion of the 'author function' in his essay *What is an Author* (Foucault, 2003b) particularly useful in helping to consider enunciative modalities, providing further discussion of how the notion of the author is often a key relation in the discursive function of the text. This prompted me in particular to consider how people come to recognise themselves as being a 'worker' or 'disabled', or someone who needs vocational rehabilitation; and how discourse produces the expertise and qualifications attributed to those who deliver vocational rehabilitation.

In Foucault's conception, 'concepts' are formed through discourse by the organisation of statements in a particular way. For example, sometimes statements will refer to other statements, either implicitly or explicitly, and they rely on these others for their meaning. Sometimes statements will occur together and perhaps even be ordered in a particular way in relation to each other. Concepts can also be re-formed or modified by various interventions, for example the transference of a type of statement that has been used in a particular way to application in a different field or setting (1981). A concept that can serve as an example from my study is the concept of work-ability. Medical statements about bodily functions and abilities, and economic statements about the 'nature' of work and viable industrial systems can be shown to be organised in such a way to produce concepts of individual ability or inability to participate in work. Thus work-ability is a concept that is formed by the organisation of statements in a particular way.

Finally, 'strategies' refer to the organisation of concepts, groups of objects and types of subjects in particular relation to each other, serving to form themes or theoretical structures. The consideration of strategies might prompt the analyst to look at places where objects, subject positions or concepts are incompatible with each other yet appear in the same discourse, perhaps forming discursive sub-groups which may not be entirely consistent with each other. One application is to look at relations between discourses and the roles that these relations play in the formation and modification of discursive elements. It also prompted me to consider the functions that a particular discourse has in the wider field of human practices, the rules and processes by which discourses are taken up, and the groups and institutions in society that serve as authorities on the appropriation of discourse (Foucault, 1981).

'Reversing' the usual relationship with discourse: Applying the 'critical' principle of reversal

Once discursive formations and the relations between them began to be more visible to me in the texts, I drew on several methodological principles outlined by Foucault in *The*

Order of Discourse (1981). The first methodological principle that Foucault sets out is the 'principle of reversal'. The focus of this principle seems to be about helping an analyst to disrupt the usual relationship that we have with discourse. Discourse produces what we can think, speak and do and usually, this is just how we experience life, so applying the principle of reversal is about explicitly seeking to reveal ways in which discourse shapes our knowledges and truths by procedures which control, limit, select and organise discourse in a particular society. The procedures Foucault (1981) articulates are those of exclusion (external to the particular discourse), limitation (internal to the discourse), and rules and restrictions of the speaking subject. Below, I outline the inquiries I derived from the description of each in *The Order of Discourse* (1981), to apply to my analysis, followed by a discussion of specific methodological considerations prompted by the principles of archaeology.

'Call into question our will to truth' (1981: 66): Procedures of exclusion

Procedures of exclusion refer to the techniques by which discourse infers what we cannot say. With these procedures of exclusion, it is not that things are literally unable to be thought or said, but to say them would be interpreted as inappropriate, insane or false. Foucault divided the procedures of exclusion into three categories: prohibition, opposition between reason and madness, and opposition between true and false. Under prohibition, Foucault asked what we do not have the right to say, even though we might be able to form the thoughts and the words; then even within what we can say, what are the limits of circumstances within which something can be said; and who has the right to speak on a topic and who does not? He suggested that an analyst should look at what is considered mad or unreasonable. He called us to ask what knowledges and truths each statement and each discourse relies on; what it renders false or invalid; and what institutions and practices maintain these knowledges and truths.

'Restore to discourse its character as an event' (1981: 66): Procedures of limitation

Procedures of limitation are the techniques by which limits are placed on what is likely to be said. Foucault discussed three procedures of limitation, each of which work to

inhibit the scope of statements that are actually uttered – commentary, the author, and disciplines. Commentary refers to an imperative to reproduce certain key texts in society, both in terms of re-telling and reproducing as part of other texts (often to secure their legitimacy). Foucault called us to ask what these texts are and examine how they are reproduced, and in particular, look at the conditions which maintain the importance of these texts. The ‘author’ is the person or group of people attributed to being the origin of the meaning of the text. Foucault argued in his essay *What is an Author* that when viewed in terms of discourse, the function of the author is in fact to limit what is said; that through association of a text with a named person or group, the institutions that serve to constrain individual behavior (such as truth, intellectual property laws, etc) also work to constrain what can be said (Foucault, 2003b). This could prompt an analyst to examine the role of the author, asking what effects the attribution of that author has on what can be said within the text. Finally, whether the text or statement is associated with or belongs to a discipline, and what discipline it can be said to fall within or outside, can help us examine what criteria the statement or text must fulfill to be considered as belonging within that discipline, in turn helping to make visible how that discipline serves to limit what can be said.

‘Throw off the sovereignty of the signifier’ (1981: 66): Setting roles and restrictions of the speaking subject

Foucault described the roles and restrictions of the speaking subject as referring to the things that give the speaking subject his or her legitimacy to speak on this topic or in this way. This could include asking what qualifies the speaker to speak on this topic, and how these qualifications are awarded (in the broadest sense, not necessarily formal qualifications). This also leads us to examine whether there are limits concerning who can speak about the topic, and if limited, whether and in what ways the discourse has been appropriated by others who are not qualified, or are qualified in other ways to speak on the topic.

Related methodological considerations

Considering the principles of archaeology led to some key realisations that had important implications for the design of my study. Firstly, as with archaeology in its more commonly known sense (relating to the study of material artifacts), there are limitations inherent in the analysis of historical texts because we are dependent on what is preserved and therefore available for analysis once the time in which it was created has passed. To give some examples, texts communicated through the arrangement of spaces or unrecorded speech are only available in the moment, while those communicated through writing, images or other material objects leave a more enduring record. This led me to question whether the more enduring forms differed with regard to the statements they contained, and therefore whether the historical texts available to me might differ importantly from those available in the present. This relates particularly to subjugated discourse — for example those things that may be articulated, but are subject to procedures of exclusion or limitation. These things, although they were present in the discourse of a particular time, may not survive to the present day. These considerations led me to design a study with two parts. One part was a historical analysis that, acknowledging this limitation, was focused on exploring the archival material with a view to how the discursive formations in the historical texts show the conditions of possibility for discourses of vocational rehabilitation in the present. This also acknowledges that one can never obtain a ‘complete set’ of discourses with all their variable articulations, and this is not the aim of a genealogy. The second part was an analysis of discourses of vocational rehabilitation in the present, with a view to exploring some of those areas likely to be subject to procedures of exclusion, limitation and rules and restrictions of the speaking subject, to make more visible both the contingencies of our present, and the potential scope within which discourse might allow us to be otherwise from what we are now. In keeping with this decision, a criterion employed for choosing present-day texts for analysis was to focus on practices that were outside the mainstream approach to vocational rehabilitation. Texts related to practices that, while still recognisable as fitting within the definition of vocational

rehabilitation, stretched the boundaries of what is acceptable, legitimate or reasonable. This approach aligns with what Foucault described in his 1982 essay *The Subject and Power* (Foucault, 1983b) as examining discourses by taking their forms of resistance as a starting point. This is a technique by which discourses are made more visible through the process of interrogating their limits.

Principles of genealogy: analyzing relations of power-knowledge and its effects

The remaining methodological principles outlined by Foucault in *The Order of Discourse* (1981) he describes as principles of genealogy. As Hook (2001) suggests, this refers to the role of these principles in sensitising 'the analyst to the pervasiveness of the power-knowledge complex.' (Hook, 2001: 524-525). Below, I outline how I interpreted each of these principles to apply to my project.

Principle of discontinuity

Foucault (1981) reminds us that in his conception of discourse, there is no grand discourse that is currently silent, hidden from discovery by the procedures described above, that lies underneath and is intertwined with everything. 'Discourses must be treated as discontinuous practices, which cross each other, are sometimes juxtaposed with one another, but can just as well exclude or be unaware of each other.' (1981: 67). In other words, the field of discourse is not a coherent whole, which is consistent with itself. This applies when looking at discourses that co-exist during a particular period, and also the way in which discourses shift and change over time. I used specific techniques during analysis to address this 'principle of discontinuity'. First, the inclusion of historical texts, and texts from multiple sources (see also below discussion of the 'principle of exteriority'), to investigate manifestations of discursive formations and practices of vocational rehabilitation from various periods and spaces (Hook, 2001; Nicholls, 2009; Tamboukou, 1999). In addition to this, a conscious effort was made to resist constructing linear narratives, but instead mapping discursive formations and

discourses across the data sources and historical points, focusing on the places at which discourse is made visible by shifts, or vulnerable by gaps or weaknesses (Hook, 2001).

A central part of genealogy is the analysis of the topic at various points in history, which work to illuminate the discourses and practices of the present time by examining their past forms. Foucault's view was that our present reality is not a peak of knowledge, but merely the current iteration, and that history can give us clues as to how this particular iteration has come about (Foucault, 2003a). His approach to historical material was to use it as a resource for calling into question the self-evidence of current truths and understandings through the exploration of past truths and understandings (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). Consideration of this alongside the principle of discontinuity led me to make a decision to restrict my historical analysis and to focus on three historical time periods, which were ascertained during a preliminary reading and analysis of texts from many different time periods. Each of the three historical periods were chosen because they were associated with a considerable shift in vocational rehabilitation thought and practice in Aotearoa / New Zealand, and therefore were points at which ways of thinking about and doing vocational rehabilitation became more visible for analysis. This strategy is similar to that employed by Nicholls (2009).

Principle of specificity

Foucault suggests that discourse must be viewed as a human practice, not as a function of reality-meets-perception. From this perspective, everything is produced by discourse, so it is discourse that must be shown for how it operates in order to open space to be otherwise. 'We must not resolve discourse into a play of pre-existing significations; we must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would have only to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour.' (1981: 67). Hook (2001) proposes that this principle should compel the analyst to focus on gathering texts from the locations where the material effects of discourse on the area of investigation can be seen, and where thought and practices and their effects appear as taken-for-

granted truths. This principle led me to primarily focus on texts that related to actual practices in vocational rehabilitation — both those which documented debates about what to do, and descriptions or occurrences of actual initiatives, programmes and schemes. This included a special consideration for those texts that discussed practices in terms of the ‘truths’ that showed those practices to be the most appropriate or ‘right’ thing to do.

Principle of exteriority

The principle of exteriority states that when analyzing discourse, we must not go looking for the meaning that discourse hides within itself, but rather we should work on the basis of the discourse itself and look to its exterior, to ask what it opens up and makes possible, and what it excludes or renders impossible or unreasonable (Foucault, 1981). Hook (2001) points out that this principle is essential to move the analysis beyond the text which is being analysed, into the discursive space that the particular text plays a part in; to move away from a focus on what the discourse *says* towards an analysis of what it *does*. Because the possible scope for analyzing ‘what discourse does’ is considerable, I would suggest that for this principle, it is especially important to adapt the way in which it is applied according to the particular research question, in order to focus analysis appropriately. The main way in which I applied this principle for my study was through focusing on the notion of ‘governmentality’ to provide me with a lens with which to question how discourse operates and its effects in the area of vocational rehabilitation. Here, I drew on the theoretical work of Foucault on governmentality, and other authors who have extended his work in this area (in particular Rose, 1999; Dean, 1999). Dean (1999) stipulates that to analyse governmentality is to study notions of governing at the points they are made practical and technical. He goes on to provide an analysis of a body of research that has been done applying the concept of governmentality, to identify common approaches in terms of questioning and analysis. I used this analysis as a guideline, by using it to develop a set of broad questions that provided a framework for the application of governmentality to my own study.

The principle of exteriority and the role of the 'text'

One of the most basic elements of a discourse analysis as I have described above is the use of 'texts' as the starting point for analysis. One of the considerations I encountered is that texts are both crucial and limited with regard to their role in the discourse analysis. While texts are an easily obtainable source of data, which can be gathered and analysed, the text is a manifestation of discourse, and texts refer to other manifestations — effects of discourse — that do not appear in the texts being analysed but are nevertheless critically important to the analysis. Therefore, it is not about analyzing what a text says so much as what the discourses present in the text make possible. Texts are a vehicle for discourse analysis because they are amenable to being collected and analysed. One of the implications of this is that in choosing texts to gather and analyse, it is important to seek those which will provide the analyst with enough scope to explore with some depth the discourses and their effects. Discourses can, and many argue should, be examined over multiple different texts, drawn from different types of sources (Hook, 2001). Foucault emphasised that discourses are tied into complex systems of knowledge-power interplay which are difficult to recognise in a single text, and it has been suggested that including a breadth of sources helps the analyst conduct a more perceptive analysis (Hook, 2001). Critical for my study, one of the key ideas in governmentality is that governmental thought and practice occurs at multiple sites within society. At a state government level, there are the analyses and actions taken regarding issues that are considered to be within the remit of government. This may include investigation, debate, regulation and legislation. At the level of provision of services, various philosophies and practices will be associated with services and the way those services interact with the community. At a community level there will be formal and informal local groups and organisations that employ practices aiming to govern the conduct of individuals and groups that fall within their interests. These all intersect and interact with the ways in which individuals govern their own conduct in their ethical relationship to themselves (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1988). For my study, I considered it was important to acknowledge these multiple sites and their roles

and interactions when gathering texts to contribute to the discourse analysis, so I put a focus on collecting a range of texts, associated with these different sites.

Foucault's analyses as 'toolbox' and foundation

I will now draw the discussion to a close in looking at one final consideration, which is the way in which, in applying Foucault's principles to a specific research question, there are significant ways in which a Foucault-informed project will differ from those that Foucault himself published. The Foucault quote below is often cited, stating that his work should be used as a 'toolbox'

I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area... I would like the little volume that I want to write on disciplinary systems to be useful to an educator, a warden, a magistrate, a conscientious objector. I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers. (Foucault, 1994: 523-524, passage translated by Clare O'Farrell))

My interpretation of this is that it doesn't mean that Foucault wanted his work to be used without consideration of the philosophical objectives he pursued, but that it should be used by the people for whom the explorations he undertook could be useful. Furthermore, during his lifetime Foucault made numerous comments about the changing nature of his long-term project, pointing to the ways in which each individual project opened up the area of study in ways that he had perhaps not expected, and how his approach needed to change along with it (for one of his later discussions of this see the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* (Foucault, 1992). I would see this as implying that if, in exploration of the ideas he opened up for his readers/users, his work can be applied in a way that he did not himself foresee or set out, he would still see this as in keeping with the intent of that work. In line with this interpretation, I will now discuss the ways in which my project (and quite possibly others like it) are enabled by Foucault's work, and how, while keeping with a Foucauldian approach, it will necessarily differ in scope and application from Foucault's projects.

Enabling topic specificity

Foucault's studies were significant in that they dealt with areas that most people could instantly recognise as established parts of human society – the clinic, the prison system, madness, sexuality. Foucault's in-depth 'histories of the present' resulted in works that discursively explored not only how some of the key structures in societies had been made possible, but also the conditions of possibility for some of the most fundamental notions we currently hold about people and society (such as the notion of the thinking, acting individual as a basic unit of society), which have much wider-ranging effects. Foucault's work was widely applicable and has, to date, made possible many insightful further studies, both those which have extended the work that he started in particular areas, and those that have taken Foucault's approach as a guide for exploring different areas.

It is because of the wide-ranging applicability of his analyses that Foucault's work has enabled other studies of aspects of societies that are much more specific — studies that arguably would not be possible without the considerable groundwork that Foucault has provided. It is in this space that I position my study. Vocational rehabilitation is a recent notion, but it is largely contingent on ways of thinking, doing and being that are much more longstanding and widely applied. Therefore, in order to conduct a specific analysis of vocational rehabilitation I have had to utilise genealogical historical analyses of these more longstanding notions undertaken by other authors, most notably Foucault. So one aspect that clearly differs from Foucault's projects is that I used his analyses as a foundation, which enabled me to conduct a genealogy of a much more specific and recently emerging aspect of society than those he chose to examine.

Explicitly examining 'the present'

In their introduction to a collection of Foucault's works *The Essential Foucault* (2003) Rabinow and Rose point out that Foucault, although he wrote 'histories of the present', never wrote an archaeology or genealogy that included analysis of the present-day. His analyses quite clearly sought to problematise the present by showing the contingencies

that have made possible our ways of thinking and acting with regard to particular present-day structures and experiences, but his books stopped well short of the present. It can be argued that even without articulating it, Foucault's histories made it very clear the aspects of his present he was critiquing (Rabinow and Rose, 2003) (and this becomes even clearer when looked at in conjunction with some of his lectures), however, this is another aspect of Foucault's methodological approach which differs noticeably from what I have chosen to do. For vocational rehabilitation, I have chosen to explicitly link an historical analysis and present-day discourses and their current effects. This is an approach often seen in sociological and health research that draws on Foucault. I would propose this is appropriate for two reasons. Firstly, in relation to Foucault's focus, vocational rehabilitation may be seen to be quite a specialised area. Foucault's histories, in part because of the recognisability of their topic (and perhaps in part because of the timeliness in relation to current events (Rabinow and Rose, 2003)) would have prompted many readers to examine the present-day situation without him having to provide a present-day analysis. For vocational rehabilitation I felt it important to explicitly examine the current discourses in this area in order to give context to the genealogy. Secondly, as vocational rehabilitation is a relatively new field, a large focus of my analysis was in showing how it has been made thinkable and doable in the first place, and then how this is maintained to the present day rather than allowing vocational rehabilitation to disappear again. This type of focus requires an analysis of the present as part of the genealogy. Rabinow and Rose (2003) argue that, in the same way that Foucault adapted Nietzsche's genealogy for his context and aims, Foucault would expect that genealogy as he developed it would continue to be adapted as appropriate for future purposes:

In his relation to Nietzsche, Foucault demonstrates that genealogy has to be invented anew as situations change. So perhaps the detailed and meticulous labor that needs to be done to unsettle our conventions must find other forms, other points of action on our present. These might be comparative, conjunctural, or ethnographic, or they may take a form that has yet to be invented or named. Thus, the practice of criticism which we might learn from Foucault would not be a

methodology. It would be a movement of thought that invents, makes use of, and modifies conceptual tools as they are set into a relation with specific practices and problems that they themselves help to form in new ways. (Rabinow and Rose, 2003: xiv-xv).

I propose to take this one step further: I would suggest that for a specific area such as vocational rehabilitation, Foucault's work has enabled a form of analysis which can include an explicit link to the present-day, combining a history of the present with an analysis of the present itself, with a focus on what discourse enables. This can encompass two types of effects concerning discourse in the present. Firstly, what is produced and reproduced by discourse to the extent that it appears self-evident. Secondly, the 'grey' areas — articulations, actions and material effects that do not fall outside of possibility within current discourse, but are still not squarely within what seems self-evident. In this way, examination of historical material can show us how the ways of thinking, doing and being as they are today have been made possible, while examination of the present can make visible what these discourses enable and what is potentially possible in terms of what discourse allows. Thus, while there are a plethora of texts dealing with mainstream practices, those practices on the boundaries, which occupy the areas of 'possible but outside the mainstream' allow an exploration of what could be. Exploring the boundaries between what is allowed and not allowed; between what makes sense and what seems absurd; highlights those things are thinkable and doable but not self-evident, and thus helps to make current discourse and its material effects more visible.

Concluding comments

Building on Foucault's work and existing secondary literature on interpretations of his methodology, this paper is intended as a discussion of how Foucault's writing can be applied to an area of health research, offering interpretations and treatments which are particularly applicable in this context. Emphasising the importance of taking the topic matter and specific project as a basis from which to read Foucault's methodological writing, I have offered some interpretations from the context of a study looking at

vocational rehabilitation through the theoretical lens of governmentality. I also consider the idea that studies that draw on Foucault's work as a starting point and guide will differ from Foucault's own studies — building on existing theoretical and methodological work, and offer a demonstration of this in relation to a specific project within health research. I propose that using this sort of approach, Foucault's methodological and theoretical work enables specific research that can apply his ideas and methods as a starting point to examine particular practices and their effects, allowing important critical analysis of circumstances and strategies in health care.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the other members of the reading and discussion group Foucaultquium, the source of much stimulating discussion, which has contributed to development of the ideas in this paper.

Funding

This work was supported by the Health Research Council of New Zealand in the form of a Disability Placement Programme PhD Award to support Fady's PhD.

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