

FINN DANIEL RAAEN

Autonomy, Candour and Professional Teacher Practice:

A Discussion Inspired by the Later Works of Michel Foucault

Autonomy is considered to be an important feature of professionals and provide a necessary basis for their informed judgments. In this essay these notions will be challenged. I will use Michel Foucault's deconstruction of the idea of the autonomous citizen, and his later attempts to reconstruct that idea, in order to bring some new perspectives to the discussion about the foundation of professionalism. The turning point in Foucault's discussion about autonomy is to be found in his proposal for an ethics of the self. This ethics invites to a break with the normalizing discourses of modernity. As I see it, this makes it particularly relevant in a discussion about the principles of professionalism. The conception of parrhesia is here central. I will use the role of the teacher to illustrate my arguments.

Will frank, independent and informed speech necessarily influence individuals to make wiser decisions? In research on professions and the education of professionals, this question has to do with how expert knowledge is applied and how professionals use their autonomy to serve their clients' best interests, so that they can eventually take better care of themselves. Foucault's works, and particularly his later works, offer a rich fund of critical ideas for discussion of such issues. Numerous books have applied Foucault's theories and methods to educational questions (e.g., Ball 1990, Marshall 1996, Blades 1997, Popkewitz & Brennan 1998, Olssen 1999, Baker 2001). Relatively few books however probe his understanding of frankness (*parrhesia*), self-construction and autonomy in the context of education. In a number of studies (Peters 2003, Franchi 2004, Luxon 2004, Besley 2005, Huskaby 2007, Papadimos & Murray 2008) there is a discussion of *parrhesia*, but not an investigation of the significance of Foucault's terms for the analysis of teachers' professional practice. In this paper I will explore this topic, especially the relevance of using *parrhesia*. An individual who applies *parrhesia* is not necessarily a professional. According to Foucault *parrhesia* is, above all, a manner of being that develops out of virtue (Foucault 1983, out of an ethics for the self. By contrast, professionals' practice is primarily legitimised by how professionals apply a set

of professional and legal norms, not by their personal moral integrity. However, *parrhesia* can play an important part in the practice of professional autonomy, as this article will show. An understanding of the relevance of Foucault's view of *parrhesia* for professional practice presupposes knowledge of his early conceptions about discipline, normalisation and autonomy.

Autonomy in Teaching: A Foucauldian Perspective

Chambliss (1977) claims that professionals offer their expert knowledge to serve others in exchange for the right to regulate their own activity. This right to regulate one's own activity is commonly termed *professional autonomy*. In contrast to laypeople it gives professionals legitimacy and a power within their jurisdiction to define what is right and true to do. Foucault, however, addresses the question of autonomy differently.

In his early writing, Foucault considered autonomy in many respects to be an illusion. Foucault's (1973, 1980) point of departure is historical. Industrialisation has liberated humans from feudal society's traditional forms of stratification. For individuals this liberation means opportunities to make individual choices. However, Foucault (1980: 132-133) believed that an apparent rather than a real increase in independence occurred; one constrained by what he called 'regimes of truth'. Individuals have made the society's disciplinary techniques and ruling ways of thinking very much their own and, by doing so, have come to believe and behave *as if* they were free and autonomous (Foucault 1986: 221). Foucault (1977) proposed that this is also the case for professionals. A well-functioning and independently acting professional will typically accommodate to an institutional setting, and act as expected in that setting. External control of how professionals use their time at work contributes to the regulation of their activities. Foucault (1977: 135-169) showed how individuals in their work are brought together in different combinations, supported by various regimes of comparison,

inclusion and exclusion. He (1977: 160) described this bringing together of individuals in different combinations in a school setting as a 'seriation' of teachers and students in successive activities in different stages, classes and groups that makes possible a detailed control and regular intervention of differentiation, correction, punishment and elimination. According to Foucault (1973: 312, 344-345), such procedures give individuals an understanding of who they are and what they are capable of: They are objects for knowledge and subjects who know.

Empirical research supports such an understanding of the professionals' functional role. Researchers have documented how professions as a particular category in Western societies are in the process of being undermined by organisational, economic and political changes, which in turn implies a reduction in their level of autonomy and opportunity to control their own work (Hargreaves 1994, Campbell et al., 1991). As a result of these changes, some have claimed that professionalism is being redefined. Another argument has been that state authorities seek to make professions more commercially viable, more focused on budgetary requirements and management (Reed 1996, Freidson 1988, 1994, MacDonald 1995, Evetts 2003). This assertion also seems to apply to the teaching profession. Teachers must, to an increasing degree, demonstrate the achievement of external, and often politically defined, goals within steadily more managerially oriented school organisations (Campbell et al., 1991, Karlsen 1993, 2002, Hargreaves, 1994, Raaen 2002). Curriculum plans and regulations that define teaching content are, according to some researchers, considered to limit, rather than encourage, the independence of teachers (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs 2002, Pink 1991). Furthermore, they claim that the standardisation of tests and examinations has made teachers focus on a limited selection of possible topics that they would otherwise want to present to their students. Research has suggested that the teachers' possibilities for professional

development are consequently narrowed (Ball 1994, Mahony & Hextall 2000, Groundwater-Smith & Sachs 2002). This narrowing of the teachers' possibilities may lead to a further restriction of the teachers' opportunities to demonstrate their own pedagogical capabilities and to stimulate their students' critical thinking (Pink 1990). Where teachers acquiesce in such disciplinary techniques, Foucault (1973: 318, 1980: 106) suggests that they come to see themselves as independent and autonomous actors, even if they are not.

Foucault's (1980: 98) position in his early works was that power must be analysed as something which circulates in the form of a chain. Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. School is one setting where this type of situation occurs. Teachers are normally allowed to promote their expert knowledge as long as it is in accordance with the aims and objectives of the school and is consistent with what is regarded as normal, true and right (as opposed to deviant, false and wrong). Foucault (1977: 191-194) argued that when teachers convince students to accept without critical objection these assumptions and to confess their weaknesses and problems, the students accept an inferior role as cases for disciplinary action by professional teachers (1988: 46-49). In so doing the students contribute to a reproduction of the professional teachers' authority. Foucault (1977: 184) describes this as part of a process of normalisation.

Reconstruction of professional autonomy: The teachers' power to act

In his early works, Foucault described individuals as historicised and disciplined and as part of a continuous normalisation, regulated by different regimes of truth. According to this conception, individuals have little room for freedom of action. By contrast, in Foucault's later works, individuals' freedom is considered an essential part of their constitution. However, for Foucault (1991: 1-2) this change represented more of a change in focus than a break from an

earlier position. The change lies in a marked contrast in how he deals with topics such as normalisation, freedom of action and truth in his earlier and later works. Foucault, in his later works, became increasingly interested in how normalisation is not only part of society's disciplinary techniques and ruling ways of thinking but also part of the subject's own active engagement and ways of reasoning. Foucault (1988: 16) described these methods and tools of normalisation as 'technologies of the self'. It would be a mistake to interpret Foucault's ideas to mean that professionals have totally lost control over the ownership of their professional knowledge, that they have no power to define the nature of the problems they face, or that they are without rights to determine access to possible solutions.

In a 1984 article, Foucault made way for a reconstruction of autonomy. In line with his earlier works (1984: 45-50) he put forward the following argument: Because knowledge does not exist independently of relations of power, one must give up the hope of adopting an external position that provides access to definite and complete knowledge of what constitutes the limits of our understanding. According to Foucault, one can, however, seek knowledge about the circumstances that have influenced one's way of thinking. He claimed that this quest can be the basis for a critical discussion and analysis of the limitations of one's understanding. Foucault maintained that such a discussion can be used as a foundation for conducting a practical historical critique and analysis, directed towards possible transgressions, and for testing what it can mean to move beyond the limits imposed upon one's work. Consequently, the point for Foucault is not to reveal truth in an essential sense but rather to explore how one relates to, applies and practises a set of truths or general principles with which one is familiar. For Foucault (1984) this implies 'a permanent critique of ourselves in our autonomy' (p. 44); 'a historical ontology of ourselves' (p. 45); and giving 'new impetus ... to the undefined work of freedom' (p. 46).

For teachers, this has to do with how they relate to the formal limits of their work – namely, curriculum goals, the administrative apparatus and relevant laws. Knowledge of how they relate to the formal limits of their work will reveal whether they actually exploit the space given by the formal structure and to what extent they use their opportunities to investigate critically the obstacles to such exploitation. Freedom and autonomy then become relative concepts that are connected to one's capacity and power to act in a certain context (Garland 1997), which Foucault (1983, 1991) described as being intimately connected with one's opportunities to oppose power and to challenge knowledge regimes. When Foucault (1983, 1991) reflected on power, power relations and autonomy in his later works, he drew heavily upon the ethical practice of the Greeks and the Romans in classical times. In what follows Foucault's elaborations will be used as a backdrop for discussing possible implications for teachers' personal autonomy and professional practice.

Foucault (1983: 65; 1988: 19-39) believed that the ancient Greeks are examples of an outspoken, independent existence, which is also possible to achieve today. According to Foucault, it is possible to compose one's own life in ways that can break with modernity's normalising discourses, thus opening up for the development of a more reflective personal autonomy. Ancient Greek society, he argues (1991: 4-5), provides good insights for how one can develop an ethical basis for self-liberation. Foucault (1991: 3) did not seek an ethics that frees individuals from society's web of power. On his analysis, the desire to develop societies or institutions that are not regulated by power is utopian. Foucault's (1991: 19-20) ambitions were more modest. He suggested that one instead concentrate on exploring how laws, management techniques, ethics and ways of practising the self can allow power to be played out in society, with a minimum of dominance. As a consequence, an ethical system is

developed that can make way for an autonomy based on an outspoken and critical thinking that breaks with the normalisation pressure faced by individuals in today's society. I will use school teachers to illustrate this point, and to show how *parrhesia* can play an important role in their practice of professional autonomy and in the empowerment of their students.

The concept of *parrhesia*: Some educational implications

According to Foucault (1983: 2), it is common to translate *parrhesia* as 'free speech' or 'frankness' (*franc-parler* in French, *Freimüthigkeit* in German). A *parrhesiastes* is one who uses *parrhesia* (i.e., one who conducts oneself in an honourable fashion and says straight out what one considers to be the truth). Thus, it is not enough for individuals who practise *parrhesia* to be honourable: they must also be frank when expressing the truth. Foucault (1983: 3) contended that the practice of *parrhesia* was regarded in classical times as a moral obligation and a personal virtue. Autonomy was thought to require individuals to possess a certain dominance or mastery over themselves so as to free them from ending up as slaves to their own lusts (Foucault 1983: 5). Foucault (1991) described this classical reasoning as especially relevant to the reconstruction of a modern, critically reflective self. This classical reasoning contrasts with the widely-held belief in our times that the self is organised around self-indulgence, egoism and self-interest (Bernauer & Rasmussen 1991). According to Foucault, being free and autonomous implies breaking with such a view and instead cultivating *parrhesia*, which involves combining a caring for the self with attentiveness and caring for others. For Foucault (1983: 54-55), this 'ethics for the self' is closely connected with *askesis*. Foucault relied not on the Christian but rather on the traditional Greco-Roman understanding of the word. To the Greco-Roman philosophers, moral *askesis* implied establishing a relationship to oneself and one's fellow citizens based on 'self-possession and self-sovereignty'. Furthermore, the ascetic practices of the Greco-Roman philosophers

implied that the individual should be morally prepared to confront the world 'in an ethical and rational manner' (1983: 55). Hence, autonomy and self-construction are not primarily matters of private concern for the individual. They are social in nature and can be developed and reconstructed only through self-conscious confrontations with the challenges of social existence, together with other people. According to these terms, Foucault viewed ascetic practice as part of *parrhesia*. Thus, central is each individual's personal moral and existential relation to himself/herself, to other people and to society.

The aims of *parrhesia* are to secure one's independence and then the independence of others and to avert stagnation. For example, Socrates told the mighty Alcibiades that before he can take care of Athens he must first learn to take care of himself (Foucault 1983: 7). This example illustrates how individuals should conduct themselves. In classical times, those individuals who did not advance towards truth through their own life and work, were said to be in danger of losing the rules by which individuals conduct their lives (i.e., losing autonomy). Those individuals robbed of *parrhesia* were viewed to be in the same situation as a slave, that is, a non-autonomous individual, because individuals who were unable to enter into a *parrhesiastic* conversation were considered incapable of being part of a real democratic political life (Foucault 1983: 6). This reasoning also implied that they were deprived of the possibility of developing their character and strengthening their reflective autonomy. To promote a fellow citizen's independent self-construction, individuals who practise *parrhesia* have to provide a precise account of what they are thinking so that the listener(s) can understand what their true meaning is (Foucault 1983: 3, 6). Thus, individuals who practise *parrhesia* must avoid any form of rhetoric when speaking that might obscure what they mean. A *parrhesiastes* therefore uses the most direct words and forms of expression that can be found to communicate what he/she considers true (Foucault 1983: 2). *Parrhesia* implies a

personal commitment: Those individuals who practise *parrhesia* believe they can offer their conversation partners something new, different or strange that will expand the conversation partners' horizons and the scope of their autonomy and provide them with space for greater understanding and self-mastery. Individuals' free, autonomous speech can bring new truth to people, thus strengthening their insight and making them better able to take care of themselves and others (Foucault 1983: 40-41).

However, the ethics of *parrhesia* do not imply that a teacher dedicated to *parrhesia* should tell the truth no matter what. A logical consequence of an ethical system based on care for the self is that if *parrhesia* is not believed to promote that type of ethics, it should not be practised. On the one hand, it can be argued that this ethics of care is inconsistent because it implies self-disclosure and the possibility of seriously hurting another individual in a frank confrontation (which is certainly true). On the other hand, it presupposes that a less mighty person is willing to practise it or that a mightier person is willing to seek advice. *Parrhesia* can also be based on a mutual agreement to engage in it. This topic will be discussed further. Moreover, there are some good reasons for encouraging self-disclosure. Self-disclosure often happens when individuals initially meet and continues as relationships are built and developed. As individuals get to know each other, they disclose information about themselves. Self-disclosure is an important building block for intimacy; intimacy cannot be achieved without it. What is inspiring about *parrhesia* is precisely that it seeks in a frank but caring and prudent way to inform individuals and their fellow citizens about the consequences of their thinking, reasoning and lifestyle that are at stake.

Teachers may practise *parrhesia* in different ways. Parents' and students' levels of trust in teachers are based on their experience as to whether the teachers speak frankly, directly and

openly about their knowledge of their students or whether they give vague and approximate statements. Hence, the trustworthiness of teachers is confirmed by their candour (Bryk & Schneider 2002). By speaking with candour about the different beliefs, values and interests that their students have, teachers may also ensure that there is space for competing views about what constitutes a good life and a good society (Gutmann 1987). The latter is highly relevant in a multicultural context in which teachers often operate. Acting with candour is not necessarily risky for teachers, but it may be. If students do not like certain teachers' frankness, they may directly or subtly hamper these teachers' educative initiatives, thereby undermining their professional legitimacy. If parents find the candour of certain teachers to be provocative, they may sue or seek to dismiss these teachers. How teachers can meet such challenges and retain *parrhesia* will be discussed later in this article.

Another possible problem with *parrhesia* is that teachers who are clearly independent and outspoken may be seen as an undermining influence on a school's educational mandate. However, this problem seems less likely to occur if teachers in their practice of *parrhesia* show their colleagues and the authorities that their frank speech implies a constructive critique of public demands, which is necessary for the education and development of students.

If students are not open and sincere towards their teachers, it is difficult for the teachers to really understand how their teaching is experienced and whether their knowledge is relevant. Straightforward and honest feedback will reveal whether teachers are enhancing their students' learning, critical reflection and understanding. Teachers therefore also need the students to act as *parrhesiastes*. From this perspective, teaching and learning not only are instruments for a better mastery of people or things but also encompass a broader scope - namely, a way of life, a self-cultivation. Inspired by Greco-Roman reasoning, Foucault (1983:

24) asserted that frankness, independence and openness alone were not considered sufficient in classical times. If a man in the classical Greek states spoke without wisdom, he was considered either foolish or insane. To be worthy of *parrhesia*, a man's reasoning therefore had to be based upon *mathesis* (i.e., learning and wisdom) and *paideia* (i.e., intellectual and moral cultivation). These aspects of reasoning seem to be highly relevant in an educational setting. Familiarity with what makes knowledge true, authoritative and convincing (*mathesis*) is necessary if students and teachers are to have substantial, open and critical discussions about knowledge, achieve *paideia* and strengthen their reflective autonomous behaviour. Based on these premises, students may practise *parrhesia* and, in so doing, provide benefits to each other and to their teachers. By practicing *parrhesia*, students are in a position to compare and contrast their understanding of knowledge with each other, the basis being the teaching they have received. This sharing of knowledge may provide insight into the different perspectives represented by their particular (possibly multicultural) 'voices'.

The '*parrhesiastic contract*': A premise for frankness and autonomy in learning situations

For professionals to be granted autonomy presupposes that they are regarded as trustworthy. In classical times, individuals believed that trust in the message put forth by teachers would be weakened if there was a lack of consistency between what the teachers taught and the life they led and between what they said and what they did – that is, between *logos* and *bios* (Foucault 1983: 37-39). In classical times, a teacher who acted consistently was called a *basanos*. Such a man was regarded as a model because he not only insisted on frankness but also proved to be receptive to critique. Foucault drew attention to Socrates as an example of a '*basanos* of other people's lives'. Thus, in accordance with a classical Greek line of reasoning, being rich in knowledge and advocating openness were not enough. One must, as a

teacher, also demonstrate that one is able to tolerate others who show openness and opposition towards oneself. However, establishing such a relationship is not easy. As previously mentioned, being frank towards people who are more powerful than oneself always poses a risk. Foucault once again argued that people in classical Greek societies can be an inspiration. According to Foucault (1983: 4-5), those living in classical times were considered to practise *parrhesia* only if a risk or danger connected with saying what one meant to be true existed. Translated to a contemporary educational context, teachers who tell the truth to their students are not said to practise *parrhesia* if there is no risk connected with what they do. By contrast, teachers who are dedicated to the care of themselves and others and who tell a disturbing, shocking or irritating truth to students, parents or their leaders, and thus risk being sanctioned, prove their frankness and are said to practise *parrhesia*. Therefore, an important aspect of practising *parrhesia* is the presence of risk in the face of pressures toward normalisation and in defence of reflective autonomy.

Taking inspirations from Foucault's later thinking, teachers might also use *parrhesia* to inspire their students to engage in conversations in which they discuss and criticise the teaching they have received. *Parrhesia* has thus significance as a special confrontational critique, either towards others or oneself, thereby possibly strengthening both aspects of personal reflective autonomy. According to Foucault (1983: 5) *parrhesia* always exists in situations where those who speak are recognised to be in an inferior position in relation to their conversation partners. Foucault repeatedly emphasised that *parrhesia* always comes from below and is directed upwards. Being frank with students probably does not often pose a risk for teachers: however, there are situations in which it can. If students do not like what their teachers say or do, the students may obstruct their teachers' initiatives and undermine their legitimacy. To be a *parrhesiastes*, it is necessary to know that one occupies a

subordinate position. Hence, students do not fulfil the role of *parrhesiastes* if they openly criticise a teacher but do not know that the teacher whom they criticise is the individual whom the criticism concerns. Being critical of an individual in authority or of a system is not enough if one is to practise *parrhesia* truly. A person who is committed to practicing *parrhesia* must also be willing to criticise openly and directly those individuals who are in power and, in such a manner, to challenge the pressure towards normalisation that exists. In Foucault's later writings (1991: 14-15), the ancient Greeks and their commitment to the practice of *parrhesia* represent a source of inspiration.

The school provides a context for illustrating the practical significance of these ideas. Teachers who endeavour to develop into reflective autonomous professionals must receive straightforward and truthful feedback from their students. When teachers ask their students for feedback, the students may have good reasons for not adopting the role of a *parrhesiastes* and for not directly expressing their opinion about the relevance or value of the teaching they have received. Based on their experience, the students may come to the realisation that some of their teachers do not handle confrontation well. Consequently, the students may choose to say just what they believe these teachers would like to hear. At issue is how teachers should act so as to promote *parrhesia* in such a manner that frankness, reflective autonomy and openness can be possible and that the normalisation pressure can be weakened. According to Foucault (1983: 30, 51-54), it is not merely fear that may represent an obstacle to students' truth telling. Students may also see personal advantages in not revealing what they really mean. They may desire to impress, or they may want to build a close relationship with an individual who has power, or they may hope to gain benefits that they otherwise would not have received. The question raised in classical literature is how those individuals with power, who desire honesty and truthful answers that can promote their reflectivity, can avoid being seduced.

A major problem here is a weakness for flattery, or desire for self-glorification. Plutarch described the difficulties of distinguishing a real *parrhesiastes* from those who flatter when one is deceived by self-glorification. In other words, it is not merely that one might be deceived by those who flatter; one can also be confused by one's own flattery (i.e., 'self-love'). Nonetheless, Foucault believed that something can be done. An individual who is truly seeking truth and honesty should look for someone who is willing to speak not only with, but against, this individual. With reference to Plutarch, Foucault (1983: 51, 52) described this type of person as someone who does not merely play 'the part of a friend' and who 'constantly [is] on the move from place to place, and changes his shape to fit his receiver'. An apparent *parrhesiastes* is one who offers only positive feedback and is afraid to provide opposition, whereas a real *parrhesiastes* is one who offers both positive and negative feedback and has the courage to provide opposition. Those who wish to practise *parrhesia* and augment their independence and autonomy in relation to others must strive to be *parrhesiastes* in the full sense.

Teachers who genuinely want to stimulate self-reflection and to receive truthful answers about how their teaching is experienced by their students might explicitly invite their students to offer opposing views and be open to using *parrhesia* in conversations in the classroom. Students must feel assured that they can be frank and critical in offering comments to their teachers on the teaching they have experienced. Foucault (1983: 10) described how citizens in classical times reached this kind of agreement, which he referred to as '*the parrhesiastic contract*'. Leaders in classical times who had power utilised such contracts when they lacked knowledge of what was true: Individuals who possessed power approached those who knew what was true but were without power. Those without power were told that if they told what

was true, they would not be punished, irrespective of how unwelcome the truth might be. However, in ancient Greek drama, an element of doubt always existed. For instance, individuals with power may lack the capacity to control themselves when confronted with the candour of others. For a *parrhesiastes*, this risk has to be calculated when the *parrhesiastic* contract is reached. *Parrhesia* is ‘the courage of the truth’ on the part of the *parrhesiastes* when faced with the risk of receiving negative reactions. Foucault (1991) contended that individuals in modern society have something important to learn from people in classical times about how they can develop reflection and independence and make room for frank and truthful communication. The following examples from the practice of teaching seek to illustrate this point.

Different approaches to *parrhesia* amongst teachers and students

When teachers practise self-criticism in public and encourage their students to criticise their teaching, students are given an indication that they too can practise *parrhesia*. Teachers can go a step further by helping students articulate their needs, their perceptions of the teaching conditions and their desires. In addition, teachers can assure their students that they can critically reflect on their teachers’ activities in public. An indication that *parrhesia* is present in the teaching context occurs when both experts and non-experts (in this context, both teachers and students) are given the opportunity to develop and practise their autonomy within a frank, argumentative conversation.

Such an approach can, however, be criticised for not adequately taking into consideration how arguments are always connected with human interests and power (Foucault 1986: 151, 203). Students can be swept away by their teachers’ well-argued definitions, diagnoses and arguments instead of considering the relevance of their own less articulated perspectives. However, *parrhesia* also implies that insight can result when tolerance is extended to

individuals who practise *parrhesia* and express themselves in a sudden, astonishing and unpredictable way. Such an unconditional form of *parrhesia* is described in classical literature as thought-provoking. It can also be unexpected and shocking. Foucault (1983: 47) uncovered this form of *parrhesia* when he analysed a dialogue between Diogenes (a *parrhesiastes*) and Alexander. Alternatively, this form of *parrhesia* can mean acting in a confrontational, unpredictable and suggestive manner. Socrates exhibited this form of *parrhesia* when he insightfully called attention to the the lack of consistency between his conversation partners' opinions and their lifestyle. According to Foucault (1983: 37), Socrates, as a teacher, characteristically demonstrated to his students the degree to which 'there is a relation between the rational discourse, the *logos*, you are able to use, and the way that you live. Socrates is inquiring into the way that *logos* give form to a person's style of life'. However, it is worth noting that the *parrhesiastes* is first and foremost speaking *with* and not *for* others. Consequently, *parrhesia* can make way for the development of an individual's reflective autonomy.

Parrhesia* and knowledge in action: A matter of *kairos

However, teachers cannot just lean back and rely on their acquired knowledge and experience. Occasionally, unexpected events and situations, which are full of risk and which have not been encountered previously, arise. In these types of events and situations, frankness and courage are necessary to grasp the opportunities, the best moments. The ancient Greeks referred to this ability as *kairos*. In classical literature *kairos* is described as requiring a special relationship to one's practice of *parrhesia* (Foucault 1983: 42). On this analysis teachers must possess humility, and also an experimental approach, in applying their own knowledge and skills. Furthermore, a high degree of attention is required towards the particular factors that always characterise a given situation. In addition, they must be sensitive towards the challenges to be faced, in light of the dynamics that are active within the context.

Kairos and *parrhesia* are sustained through responding sincerely to the inherent demands of such challenges, not through reference to a virtuous order that is external to social practices.

It can be concluded that autonomous teachers must not merely know the right things and be capable of acting adequately at the right moments. They must also dare to use their informed discretion in confronting conventional practice, thereby seeking new solutions and elevating students' understanding. Thus, good teaching implies more than just replication and application of knowledge that is learned in teacher education. Following the classical tradition, modern research shows that good teaching also presupposes an interpretative and associative use of professional knowledge to fit the particular context one is dealing with (Eraut 1994). However, because contexts are not permanent, they can be challenged. Teachers practise a *parrhesia* that includes *kairos* when they dare to deviate from the accustomed and familiar in the educational setting and introduce new rules and procedures, so as to make their students' education richer and encourage their empowerment, learning and understanding. Teacher education could prepare for this by giving student teachers some initial capability in practising *parrhesia*.

***Parrhesia*, self-examination and reflective practice**

Based on Foucault's explorations of *parrhesia* I have in this article tried to show how professionals can develop an ethics of the self that can further their personal reflective autonomy and confront the pressure of normalisation that is ever-present in the school system. However, Foucault's idea of an ethics of the self has a broader scope of relevance to professional teaching. That is to say, it is also highly relevant to teachers' self-reflexivity and identity construction.

In his researches on classical thinkers, Foucault (1983: 55-63) identifies different forms of self-examination and self-investigation that an individual may use so as to maintain one's reflective autonomy and further develop the ethics of the self. Individuals are drawn to investigate how one thinks, what one is occupied with, what the blind paths are and what leads to greater degrees of critical self-reflection and systematic criticism. According to Foucault these inspections will help one achieve a peace of mind that may lead to better self-control. Moreover, he highlighted the necessity of exposing oneself to trials so as to determine to what degree one makes space for *parrhesia*, what obstructs oneself as a person from acting as a *parrhesiastes* and what prevents others from practising it. To master these exercises, a number of classical texts recommend adopting a critical stance to one's self by regularly stopping one's work, stepping back and looking at it from a distance.

The value of adopting a critically reflective stance to one's practice has been a central theme in modern research on professions. Like in the classical understanding of *parrhesia*, distinctions are drawn in the so-called 'reflective practice movement' today amongst reflections before, during and after the action (Schön 1987, van Manen 1995). Furthermore, in accordance with the classical tradition a line is drawn between reflecting upon one's own practice and reflecting upon how social and cultural factors influence that practice (van Manen 1995, Zeichner 1994). Foucault's researches are more probing however than most of the research literature on professional education. It is not critical reflection as such that preoccupied him. Reflection without *mathesis* and *paideia* can, as Foucault showed, undermine *parrhesia* and obstruct professional practice. Nonetheless, this notion scarcely features as a theme in research associated with the 'reflective practitioner' movement, as some have pointed out (Zeichner 1994, Shulman 1988).

Conclusion

Foucault underlined that *parrhesia* is not associated with force but rather with freedom and personal autonomy. To outline particular procedures for *parrhesia* within the teaching profession would be to undermine the kind of a frank, independent and reflective practice that *parrhesia* is in itself. Foucault embarked upon an ethical errand in his works. He wanted to show how certain ethical practices of the ancient Greeks and Romans in handling political, social and educational dilemmas can contribute towards a break with modernity's normalising discourses and make way for more autonomy (i.e., in a way that implies taking care of the self and others). The object of this article has been to discuss possible implications for teachers' professional practice. If the ideas of Foucault are taken up, the correct answers cannot simply be appropriated from classical texts. One can surely find inspiration from them, however: if there is anything these texts show, it is that what is correct varies from individual to individual. The different discussions of *parrhesia* in classical texts always deal with answers to actual challenges faced by individuals in the special situations in which they find themselves. Just as Foucault sought to illustrate the notion of *parrhesia* with telling examples from classical Greek sources, today's research might find telling material for research on *parrhesia* in the concrete predicaments that regularly arise in schools, colleges and other environments of formal learning (i.e. critical case studies). It is in this practical sense that Foucault suggests to his readers that they explore the relevance of *parrhesia* for their own professional practice.

References

- BAKER, B. (2001) *In Perpetual Motion: Theories of Power, Educational History and the Child* (New York, Peter Lang)
- BALL, S. (1990) *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge* (London, Routledge)
- BALL, S. (1994) *Educational Reform: A Critical Post-structural Approach* (Buckingham, UK, Open University Press)

- BERNAUER, J. and D. RASMUSSEN (eds.) (1991) *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press)
- BESLEY, T. (2005) Foucault, truth telling and technologies of the self in schools, *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 6, 1, pp. 76-89
- BLADES, D.W. (1997) *Procedures of Power and Curriculum Change: Foucault and the Quest for Possibilities in Science Education* (New York, Peter Lang)
- BRYK, A.S. and B. SCHNEIDER (2002) *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation)
- CAMPBELL, R.J., EVANS, L., NEIL, S.R. and A. PACKWOOD (1991) *Workloads, Achievements and Stress: Two Follow-up Studies of Teacher Time in Key Stage 1* (Warwick, UK, Policy Analysis Unit, Department of Education, University of Warwick)
- CHAMBLISS, W.J. (1977) *Motsättning och konflikt. En introduktion till sociologin (Contrasts and Conflicts: An Introduction to Sociology)* (together with ELWIN, G., RYTHER, T.E. and P. STEVENSON) (ALMAserien, 80, Stockholm, Sweden, Wahlström and Widstrand)
- ERAUT, M. (1994) *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence* (London, The Falmer Press)
- EVETTS, J. (2003) The sociological analysis of professionalism: occupational change in the modern world, *International Sociology*, 18. 2, pp. 395-415
- FOUCAULT, M. (1973) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, Vintage Books)
- FOUCAULT, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London, Penguin Books)
- FOUCAULT, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, (C. Gordon, ed.) (Brighton, UK. The Harvester Press)
- FOUCAULT, M. (1983) *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia* (six lectures given by Michel Foucault at the University of California, Berkeley Oct-Nov. 1983, USA), Edited from tape by J. Pearson (1985), <http://foucault.info>
- FOUCAULT, M. (1984) What is enlightenment? in: P. RABINOW (ed.) *The Foucault Reader* (New York, Pantheon Books)
- FOUCAULT, M. (1986) *Language, Counter-memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, (D.F. BOUCHARD, ed.) (Ithaca/NY, Cornell University Press)

- FOUCAULT, M. (1988) Technologies of the self, in: L.H. MARTIN, H., GUTMAN and P.H. HUTTON (eds.) *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst, MA, The University of Massachusetts Press)
- FOUCAULT, M. (1991) The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom: an interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984, in: J. BERNAUER and D. RASMUSSEN (eds.) *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press)
- FRANCHI, S. (2004) Review of 'fearless speech'. *Essays in Philosophy* (5, 2, Article 11)
- FREIDSON, E. (1988) *Profession of Medicine: A Study in the Sociology of Applied Knowledge* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press)
- FREIDSON, E. (1994) *Professionalism Reborn: Theory, Prophecy and Policy* (Cambridge, UK, Polity Press)
- GARLAND, D. (1997) *Governmentality and the problem of crime: Foucault, criminology, sociology* (Theoretical Criminology, 1, 2. pp.173-214)
- GROUNDWATER-SMITH, S. and J. SACHS (2002) The activist professional and the reinstatement of trust, in: *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 32., 3, pp. 341-358
- GUTMANN, A. (1987) *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press)
- HARGREAVES, A. (1994) *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers' Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age* (London, Cassell)
- HUSKABY, M.F. (2007) Conversation on practices of the self within relations of power: for scholars who speak dangerous truths, in: *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20. 5, pp. 513-529
- KARLSEN, G.E. (1993) *Desentralisert skoleutvikling (De-centralized School Development)* (Oslo, Norway, Ad Notam Gyldendal)
- KARLSEN, G.E. (2002) *Utdanning, styring og marked: norsk utdanningspolitikk i et internasjonalt perspektiv (Education, Government and the Market: Norwegian Educational Policy in an International Perspective)* (Oslo, Norway, Universitetsforlaget)
- LUXON, N. (2004) Truthfulness, risk, and trust in the late lectures of Michel Foucault, *Inquiry*, 47.5, pp. 464-489
- MACDONALD, K.M. (1995) *The Sociology of the Professions* (London Sage)
- MAHONY, P. and I. HEXTALL (2000) *Restructuring Teaching: Standards, Performance and Accountability* (London, Routledge)
- MARSHALL, J.D. (1996) *Michel Foucault: Personal Autonomy and Education* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands. Kluwer Academic Publishers)

- OLSSSEN, M. (1999) *Michel Foucault: Materialism and Education* (Westport, CT, Bergin and Garvey)
- PAPADIMOS, T.J. and S.J. MURRAY (2008) Foucault's 'fearless speech' and the transformation and mentoring of medical students, *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*. 3.12. Published online 2008 April 17. doi: 10.1186/1747-5341-3-12
- PETERS, M.A. (2003) Truth-telling as an educational practice of the self: Foucault, 'parrhesia' and the ethics of subjectivity, *Oxford Review of Education*, 29.2, pp. 207-224
- PINK, W.T. (1990) Implementing curriculum inquiry. Theoretical and practical implications, in: J.T. SEARS and J.D. MARSHALL (eds.) *Teaching and Thinking about Curriculum: Critical Inquiries* (New York, Teachers College Press)
- POPKEWITZ, T.S. and M. BRENNAN (eds.) (1998) *Foucault's Challenge: Discourse, Knowledge and Power in Education* (New York, Teacher's College Press)
- REED, M. (1996) Expert Power and Control in Late Modernity: an Empirical review and theoretical synthesis, *Organizational Studies* 17(4), pp. 573-597
- RAAEN, F.D. (2002) *Læreplaners fortelling om danning. M87 og L97 i et dannings- og maktteoretisk perspektiv (The Curriculum's Narratives about Bildung: M87 and L97 in a Bildung-Theoretical and Power-Theoretical Perspective)* (Doctoral thesis. Department of Education, University of Oslo, HiO-rapport 2002 nr 15, Oslo University College, Centre for the Study of Professions)
- SCHÖN, D. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco, Jossey Bass)
- SHULMAN, L. (1988) The Danger of Dichotomous Thinking in Education, in: GRIMMETT, P. and G. ERICKSON (eds.): *Reflection in Teacher Education* (New York, Teachers College Press)
- VANMANEN, M. (1995) On the epistemology of reflective practice, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 1.1, pp. 33-50, <http://www.ualberta.ca/~vanmanen/epistpractice.htm>
- ZEICHNER, K.M. (1994) Research on teacher thinking and different views of reflective practice in teaching and teacher education, in: CARLGREN, I., G. HANDAL and S. VAAGE (eds.): *Teachers' Minds and Actions: Research on Teachers' Thinking and Practice* (London, The Falmer Press)