# Intelligence testing, ethnicity, and construction of the deviant child: Foucault and special education in Sweden

**Thom Axelsson**
Faculty of Education and Society
Malmö University
Email: thom.axelsson@mah.se

## Abstract

In this article, I discuss how Foucault may help us to reach a different understanding of special education. This article primarily draws on two analytical tools from Foucault's 'toolbox': genealogy and governmentality. These tools are used to analyse three different cases of intelligence testing from the debate concerning the Swedish school organization in the early twentieth century. It is possible to see intelligence-quotient (IQ) testing as an overarching tool for controlling social behaviour. Intelligence-quotient testing was an important tool of power, with the aim of establishing certain regimes of truth on a societal as well as on an individual level. This article shows through a Foucauldian analysis that we should be careful in interpreting this entirely as an expression of state power from above or as different experts' intentions. Rather, by using a genealogical approach, we can attempt to (re)write the history of interpretations, or problematizations, and then we can utilize a perspective of governmentality that focuses on the techniques and their effects.

**Keywords:** IQ testing, genealogy, governmentality, Foucault, special education, Sweden

## Introduction

Throughout the twentieth century, the nature of intelligence has been a 'hot topic' and an intensely debated issue, especially in school and in connection with special education. It is the measuring and testing of intelligence in particular that have evoked the strongest reactions from protesters and defenders alike. The discussion of intelligence tests has frequently revolved around questions such as whether these tests will lead to increased social integration and liberation or, on the contrary, to exclusion of and discrimination against certain groups. In this context is it hard to ignore the impact of the work of Foucault on special education and on constructions of the deviant child.

It is not easy to define exactly what special education is, but it is often associated with school activities and special instruction for students in need of special support. However, this is too narrowly defined, so the special-education

activities should be seen in a wider perspective that also includes social, organizational, and didactic perspectives. Research on special education is often interdisciplinary and includes disciplines such as medicine, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, and, occasionally, history. In recent years, special-education research has been exposed to some criticism that it is too self-directed and focused on deviation. Also, it has been argued that special-education research is often ideological, normative, and policy-prescriptive, and it lacks a theoretical base (Ahlberg, 2007; Nilholm & Björk-Åkesson, 2007). At the same time, the Swedish School Inspectorate has pointed to several shortcomings both in the identification and the investigation of pupils placed in special classes, which is remarkable in the light that since the early 1990s the placements of students in special classes have increased (Skolinspektionen, 2011).

The focus of the present article is not intelligence-quotient (IQ) testing and the construction of 'deviance' as a political and educational concern. Rather, it is the tools and techniques of government set up in school and society for 'the conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 2008). The article primarily draws on two analytical tools from Michel Foucault's 'toolbox', namely, genealogy and governmentality, and examines how these may help us to raise new questions that are neither normative nor have an ideological perspective.

This article primarily focuses on Swedish conditions during the early twentieth century, and comprises three main parts. The first gives a background to Foucault's concepts and his views on knowledge and power. The second focuses on intelligence testing and the debate concerning the Swedish school organization. I shall use three different 'cases' or 'problem descriptions' to discuss how Foucault's tools can help us to analyse the differentiation into categories of giftedness in school: *the concept of talent; the 'Tattare': construction of a risky group; and making the right choices*. In the concluding third part I shall discuss how Foucault's work can contribute to a reinterpretation of history of both special education and the deviant child and how this may awaken us to a different understanding of the underlying issues.

## Foucault's concepts of genealogy and governmentality

Since the concept of genealogy can be used in different ways, it is important, first of all, to make some distinctions. The genealogical method as it was developed by Foucault is not about tracing the origin of things, as if thoughts and practices have a definitive and unquestionable beginning which researchers can discover through scientific methods. Rather, genealogy, according to Foucault, is a historical method that aims not to reconstruct the past as 'it really happened', but,

> … to identify the accidents, the minute deviations——or conversely, the complete reversals——the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value to us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents. (Foucault, 1984a, p. 81)

The genealogical method is more concerned with the often unexpected and strange connections between ideals, intentions, and strategies, on the one hand, and the actual outcome of these, on the other. At a more fundamental level, genealogy is fuelled by a desire to do research without leaning on the well-established enlightenment dream of society as moving towards a

humanistic utopia through reason and science. Instead, the genealogical approach presupposes a world where power relations and ongoing conflicts belong to the warp and woof of social life and where human agency, intentions, and aspirations must always be understood in relation to dominant discourses and specific, time-bound 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1980, p. 131).

The genealogical approach can never assume, therefore, an underlying essence, a strict cause or an objective truth behind certain phenomena, and consequently do research on this basis. Rather, it should examine how, under what conditions, and with what effects a certain phenomenon is viewed as true or false, important or unimportant, relevant or irrelevant, and so on. What is constructed as a problem for school or society during a certain period is, therefore, not viewed as a fact by the researcher but as something contingent, something that could have been ignored or formulated in many different ways, given the different dominant discourses. Simply put: genealogy is about destabilizing what has been taken for granted, to defamiliarize that which has come to be viewed as familiar and ordinary (Qvarsebo & Axelsson, 2015).

Furthermore, and importantly, a genealogical approach to historical research entails an analysis of power relations and power mechanisms. Foucault coined the term *governmentality* to theorize and analyse power relations in their many historical guises. The concept of governmentality is only briefly discussed by Foucault (2008) himself and more fully described in his lectures (Foucault, 2010). Researchers such as Dean (1999) and Rose (1999) have developed the concept, and Larsson (2005) has discussed governmentality in the Swedish context. Governmentality can be a specific modern style of governing, such as *disciplining power* and *biopower*, but it can also refer to the countless rationalities, logics, truth claims, and techniques that accompany governing in itself. In this article, the analysis of governmentality is understood in this latter sense and is geared towards analysing the different ambitions to form and shape children within the Swedish school system.

The basic premise of governmentality is that all types of governing rest on certain assumptions about those who are governed. In modern times there is almost always some form of scientific knowledge that is invoked. However, it is not possible to analyse how government works without also studying the practices through which it works as well as the desired personal qualities and behaviours that are expected (Foucault, 1988a; Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999). The assumptions of government, the knowledge it invokes, the techniques it mobilizes, and the kind of subject it seeks to fabricate are, therefore, the central features of this analysis.

To make use of genealogy is, finally, to engage in discourse analysis. Here this means that the focus is on the more or less systematic ways of talking and thinking about various phenomena and practices, which in different ways serve to structure and organize our lives as individuals and societies (Foucault, 1981). Based on this constructionist perspective, there is no pure and unmediated knowledge about the world: our knowledge is always mediated through linguistic categories, concepts, and thoughts. The world comes into existence – in the sense of becoming comprehensible, manageable, and possible to act in and on – when it is named and categorized in certain specific ways. To understand Foucault, it is important to elaborate his constructionist or, as he himself preferred to call it, nominalistic view on knowledge and his approach to power.

## Nominalism and power

Following Foucault, Beronius (1991) argues that history, sociology, and the social sciences in general should be understood as nominalistic or anti-realistic. From this perspective, language is not perceived as a neutral medium, but as constitutive of the way we understand the world and create meaning. Truth is a consequence of the preferential right of interpretation. It is the perspective that gives or ascribes a meaning to the material. The scientist does not expose a hidden meaning, but creates a meaningful context. When working with the theory of science, we should, therefore, according to Beronius (1991), avoid concepts like reality and truth. This may sound provocative, but the problem with these concepts is that they are not readily defined. To avoid the muddle that can follow from attempts at defining reality and truth, Beronius suggests using the concept of perspective. It is not possible, Beronius says, to step outside one's own social and cultural situation. In other words, it is inescapable that knowledge is tied to a perspective. Beronius writes that the idea of a single narrative or a theory must be abandoned in favour of narratives in the plural, a range of diverse perspectives. Everything we run into and experience in the world is interpretation. This attitude to the theory of science, therefore, entails an epistemological nominalism, according to which knowledge is created in a social context. All descriptions are necessarily incomplete and fragmentary. In this respect, according to Beronius, there is nothing different about scientific attempts to describe or explain situations and events which are not limited in language and concepts.

Foucault, with his nominalistic view of knowledge, rejects the claims, often absolute, of positivist science (Foucault, 2004). In line with this, Foucault is also sceptical of the ideological 'meta-narratives', which, for example, is found in Marxism and liberal humanism. While Marxism tends to see different institutions of society, such as school, as repressive and anxious to preserve the prevailing social order, liberal humanism tends to see the same institutions as supportive, as they help individuals to achieve freedom and emancipation. Foucault views ideology as a loaded concept, and believes that there is good reason to seek an attitude towards power that is removed from ideological perspectives, as these perspectives are not sufficient for understanding how power works (Nilsson, 2008). Another problem with the concept of ideology is that it talks about the division between true and false consciousness, which cannot be combined with a nominalist view of knowledge.

Historically, different processes of power/knowledge, which have contributed to the growth of new knowledge about humans and their behaviour, have acquired scientific status. It is not possible, according to Foucault (1993), to separate knowledge from the power that creates it. Power and knowledge are what determines at any given time what is to be regarded as a problem in a society. Another way to put it is that power produces truths as problems. Power and knowledge presuppose each other – there is a mutual dependence between them: power produces knowledge (Foucault, 1993; 1988a; 2008; Deleuze, 1990; May, 2006). The historian only has access to representations of reality. 'Representations' should here be understood as a replacement, not a depiction or reflection of reality (Nilsson, 2005).

Foucault believes that power is not something that is owned; it is exercised. Furthermore, he views power as a part of all relations, not something separate. However, though Foucault believes that power is a part of all relations, this does not mean that all relations are steered by power. The point is that power is negotiable and changeable; it circulates (Foucault, 2004).

That power is not owned also implies that there is nothing to disclose. The task is not to see what is behind the veil, but to describe the veil. Power in this sense is beyond good and evil. The interesting question to ask is, not what power is, but how it is practised (Deleuze, 1990). Power is most productive when its effects are not directly apparent as effects of power to those affected by it. Yet power should not primarily be regarded as 'negative', as a penalty or an obstacle, but as 'positive', as something creative, productive and encouraging. All in all, power creates more than it controls (Foucault, 1988c; 1980; Deleuze, 1990). The productive aspect of power is a frequently misunderstood part of Foucault's view of power (Nilsson, 2000; May, 2006)

According to Foucault (1984a), history is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle. Instead, it is,

> …the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked 'other'. The forces operating in history are not controlled by destiny or regulative mechanisms, but respond to haphazard conflicts. (p. 88)

A Foucault-inspired approach, therefore, makes it possible to tackle a research problem with other types of questions, by stressing the association between knowledge formation and power, and the effects this association has on groups and individuals. A fundamental question is what makes a particular phenomenon in a certain historical period gain attention, and this puts the focus on the problematic of power and the link between power, knowledge, and social practices (Foucault, 1988d). With this view of knowledge and how it is created, it is possible to question what is taken for granted. To return to IQ testing, then, the question is not how many 'moronic' or 'intelligent' people there 'really' are in a country. A 'stupid' person, just like an 'intelligent' person, does not simply exist, but is constructed with the aid of categories in a cultural context. Questions that are central to this perspective are, rather: How do ideas of intelligence arise? In what contexts has it been important to categorize people according to different degrees of intelligence? Some examples of this are discussed below.

## The concept of talent: new technics and technology

Questions about talent and intelligence became an important part of the changes in the educational system in the Western world during the early twentieth century. Perceptions of society's resources of talent and the gifts of individuals shaped the social life in different respects. Views on talent led to two central aspects: how good talent should be made use of, and how poor talent should be counteracted. In schools, teachers, school inspectors, psychologists, and so forth were engaged in gathering knowledge on pupils and designing tests to identify special problems and solutions. The study of the social and institutional connections in which intelligence tests came to be seen as useful makes it possible to see the influence that the professionals had, via negotiations, professionalization and scientification, over the shaping of schools and, consequently, over future citizens. Education and school were seen as important in the development of conceptual formation around the significance of citizenship and as part of identity-building, but also as a system for differentiation and control (Axelsson, 2007).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the eugenic movement was growing. It made it important to observe deviations at an early stage, which placed

children and their development and maturity, especially their intellectual ability, in focus. Children's receptivity to education was considered to stand in relation to their intellectual ability. The lesser the talent, the harder it is to influence the environment. When the scientific and political interests started to apply to the inner human being, and their aptitude, abilities and talents, it became more important to gain both knowledge about talent and knowledge of how to measure it (Danzinger, 1997; Rose, 1995).

Knowledge was also developed within the international scientific community. The Englishman Francis Galton's normal curve, that is, his argument that every nation's intelligence was distributed in accordance with a normal curve, made an incredible breakthrough, as did the Frenchman Alfred Binet's method for measuring intelligence. Binet wanted to use intelligence tests to determine which pupils were behind in their mental development. Those who were three years behind their biological age would be separated out and placed in remedial classes. The intelligence test never became popular in France. By contrast, in England, where the intelligence test was mainly used in sorting pupils during the transition from lower to higher forms of education, it had a major impact. So too in the United States, where intelligence testing became even more widespread and strongly influenced social policy through revised education policy, psychological practices, immigrant laws, and the relationship between them. In England, intelligence was often linked to social class; in the United States, it was linked to race (Axelsson, 2012a; Gould, 1996; Zenderland 2001).

Intelligence testing was introduced in Sweden and used for the first time in 1910. A common perception was that 50 per cent of children were normal, 22 per cent were dull, and 22 per cent were bright. Of these, three per cent were very bright and three per cent very dull. The comprehensive problems of drawing up boundaries also led to new, stricter categories of talent to describe pupils, such as 'idiot', 'imbecile', 'moronic', 'slightly backward', 'normal', and 'above average'. At the same time, at the beginning of the twentieth century, as schools moved towards a more organizationally uniform system, the separation widened regarding talent within elementary schools through new class types being introduced. Remedial classes were introduced in 1905 in Stockholm and in the following year in Gothenburg. During the 1920s many towns introduced different types of 'B', 'extra', and 'weak classes'. In Sweden, intelligence was frequently linked to social class and intelligence testing was used primarily to determine which class a pupil belonged to. What was central to the sorting of pupils was to homogenize the classes in such a way that all pupils received the type of education that, with reference to talent, they were seen to be able to cope with. The 'idiots' and 'imbeciles' were completely separated from elementary schools. 'Moronic' and 'slightly retarded' pupils would, however, remain within the framework of elementary school education, but would be separated from normal classes and placed in remedial and 'weak' classes (Axelsson, 2007).

Power and knowledge determine, according to Foucault (1993), what is considered a problem in society at a given time. Historically, new knowledge on the human race and its behaviour has been given scientific status, which has led to various consequences for groups and individuals in society. Through different boundaries and exclusions (that is, separating practices) in the educational system, individuals become visible both as individuals and as groups. The processes involved in this sorting work can, in Foucault's terminology, be described as a disciplinary exercise of power where the examination combines hierarchizing and standardizing. What is important in this form of exercise of power is that the social norm, rather than the legal regulations, is central (Foucault, 2004).

The examination was shaped in schools where different professionals increasingly began to determine the pupils' evaluations and the schools' social organization. Different qualities described as desirable or undesirable were linked to the different categories of talent. The examining and separating processes identified students who were understood to be problematic and also revealed a view of what talent is and when it is absent. The techniques that were used were not necessarily connected to a particular profession that exemplifies a system, nor were they linked to a particular person or profession, and in this respect the techniques were impersonal (Foucault, 1993).

Foucault (2004) was interested in different governing techniques that shaped new forms of subjectivities and procedures for the individualization of power. It is possible to see IQ testing as an overarching tool for controlling social behaviour. Intelligence-quotient testing was an important tool of power aiming at the establishment of certain regimes of truth, both on a societal and on an individual level. It entails techniques and tools that have been instrumental in shaping and moulding collective bodies, regions, and nations in the Western world in specific ways, often in relation to social class, gender, and ethnicity. In the next section, I present an example of how this could also be directed against a specific group.

## The 'Tattare': how to construct a risky group

When the early Swedish welfare state was created, the aim was to develop 'a good society' through meticulous planning. Therefore, it was especially important to be aware of those who could not support themselves. At the time, the so-called 'Tattare' came increasingly into focus. Gradually, the families labelled as 'Tattare' came to be racialized as they were described as 'dark', and 'black-haired' and their ways of life were said to be the result of genetics and hereditary biology. The newspapers often wrote about the Tattare in a negative way, and as a group they were often portrayed as a heavy burden for society. Initially, 'Tattare' was a name for several transient groups. They were characterized by certain cultural traits, as 'social outcast[s] formed by continuous exclusion from the majority population'. The Tattare can be seen as a minority group created when Sweden turned from bring a nation with an agrarian economy into one with an industrialized urban society (Broberg & Tydén, 1996; Ericsson, 2015; Axelsson, 2012b).

The National Board of Social Welfare were looking to introduce some measures to prevent vagrancy, since vagrancy was viewed as being closely connected to most problems associated with the Tattare. Furthermore, according to the Board, manslaughter, knifing, and violence were common among the Tattare. This could, according to the Board, be explained by the Tattare's inferior intelligence. In particular, there was an interest in the Tattare children of school-going age. The National Board of Social Welfare in 1940 reported that, 'It is now a well-known fact that childhood can very often lay the basis of criminality and other forms of social maladjustment' (*Sociala meddelanden*, 1940, p. 805).

In 1942 the Swedish government commissioned the National Board of Social Welfare to investigate the Tattare question. The Board of Social Welfare, in turn, commissioned the Race Institute to compile a complete register and catalogue all persons considered to be 'Gypsies' or 'Tattare'. In connection with this, several Tattare projects were initiated. One of these was an inquiry into educational ability among this group – a project initiated by a head teacher for the remedial classes (*hjälpklasser*) in Gothenburg, Manne Ohlander. He thought

that mapping their educational ability might be of practical use in the 'battle' against the 'problem of Tattare'.

Ohlander carried out his inquiry in two different ways. One involved tracing the lineage of three different families. He sent out questionnaires about their marriage, and number of children, as well as work history, criminality, and so on. Alternatives to the answers included 'deceased' and 'completed schooling a long time ago'. One of the questions related to signs of intellectual deficiency. Ohlander employed different methods to 'calculate' and estimate their intelligence. Even where no intelligence test had been done, Ohlander sometimes estimated an IQ of < 80, which meant that they were regarded as 'backward' (Ohlander, 1943a, pp. 2-4).

Ohlander's other method involved sending a questionnaire to approximately 80 school districts. He asked how many Tattare children were in each class, and how many attended special-education class. The result was disheartening. No fewer than 30 per cent of the Tattare children in this report went to special classes, which meant that they probably had an IQ < 80. Still, Ohlander insisted that this percentage was too low, since not all Tattare children could get a place in a special-education class (Ohlander, 1943b). In his report Ohlander wrote that the Tattare were criminals and anti-socials, and that they were unable to look after their homes and children. Words like 'backward', 'less able', and 'unreliable' were common in Ohlander's text. Referring to the case of the United States, Ohlander argued that differences exist between races, especially with regard to ability (Ohlander, 1943a).

Ohlander had a great influence on special education at a local level in Gothenburg and, to some extent, at a national level, since in a few official studies he was consulted as an expert. Ohlander's views never became the dominant opinion, but he was a part of the eugenics movement in Sweden and represented a commonly held fear that 'the wrong people' should be allowed to propagate. Social problems were linked to a lack of talent and it was discussed how these problems could be controlled. This does not mean that all 'less talented' people were looked upon as asocial or criminal, but there was a 'high risk' of this. The problems lay mainly in an imaginary future and had to be prevented through proper education and upbringing. As Foucault points out, citizens were directed to recognize themselves as part of society, as a part of a social unit, as a part of the nation or State. The logic and rationality that emerged in connection with the welfare state was that the State referred to its own nature and its own rationality (Foucault, 1988e). In order to be a satisfactory citizen, certain rationalities had to be accepted (Cruikshank, 1999).

Intelligence tests can be seen as an alternative to previous categorizations. If someone had a low IQ it was not so important which other category they belonged to. Though the degree of intelligence replaced earlier divisions, it was nevertheless built on the same pattern. Intelligence tests were presumed to make certain invisible differences visible and it did not matter if the person was a Tattare, a Gypsy, a criminal, an alcoholic or if the person was immoral, unwilling to work, or merely poor. Low levels of talent could be reason enough for different authorities such as schools, poor relief or care for the mentally retarded to intervene if they believed it was necessary. In this context, schools had two important tasks to carry out: through intelligence testing the less talented could be discovered in time and by this means the school could educate them correctly (Axelsson, 2012b).

## Making the 'right choices': a field of opportunity

With the help of intelligence tests, institutional changes were carried out in Sweden, which led to a new system and new forms of sorting in schools. Sorting according to intellectual ability became the cornerstone in the categorization of pupils in cities during the 1920s and onwards. In a democratic society built on meritocratic ideals it was difficult to justify a school system that was divided according to social class, gender, geography, and, later, ethnicity. The radicals of the time saw this as social injustice. In this context, talent functioned as a bridge. In 1927, a reform was implemented that enabled students to move on after a number of years in the common elementary school to lower secondary school. But education was seen to be expensive and during the 1920s there was also the worry that an overqualified proletariat was being created. For talented individuals, there were no formal obstacles after 1927 to enter further studies, but for the poor, the opportunities were few in reality. That all future citizens required a deeper political education was, therefore, not the same as allowing everyone to have the same education. Consequently, a socially stratified school system was by and large preserved (Axelsson, 2007; Hjörne & Säljö, 2008).

As a way of bridging the opposition that might arise between the individual's educational wishes and society's interests, it was a central task of the school to lead the pupils to come to the decision themselves to want to make the right choices depending on ability and capability. Different talent categories were seen to be adapted for different social tasks. Symptomatically enough, intelligence was defined as the ability to adapt to surrounding circumstances. The less talented, often hereditarily tainted, were supposed to have difficulties in adapting and were, in some respects, easily influenced by their environment. Swedish sociologist and politician Alva Myrdal calculated that three per cent of the population would never be able to 'keep house'. These three per cent, 'the very dull ones', were a heavy burden on the general welfare system (Myrdal, 1946). These divergences from the norm were often found in school among the children in remedial classes (help classes). Gunnar Dahlberg (1936-1937), director of the Swedish Race Institute, argued that it was important to study the children in the help classes: already at school age, these children showed that their intelligence was too weak for them to follow a 'normal' working pace. Both Myrdal and Dahlberg had some degree of influence on the Swedish social policy and they shared the fear that the less talented would develop asociality, criminality, and a hostile attitude towards society if they did not receive a suitable education. The special classes would really benefit them and give them the right direction and attitude for society. Through training, they could be brought up to become competent citizens who could support themselves (SOU 1936:31).

But children who went to help class left school, according to paragraph 48, which stated that a pupil who was less talented could be released from school duties before the six compulsory years, but not before the age of 14. Paragraph 48 made it difficult for such pupils to enter governmental employment and work for, say, the State Railways or the Post Office; only in 1955 was this paragraph removed (Axelsson, 2007).

Intelligence tests and other techniques can be seen in the light of an early form of social engineering. The logic that characterized social engineering was the acceptance that people needed to be informed or led by different experts. It was science that should organize society in the best conceivable way, and it was able, through its expertise, to find strategic solutions to society's problems. So-called 'prophylactic social politics' were the means for creating good order in society, and they began to make an appearance in the 1930s.

The modernization of society demanded a modernization of the individual and hence new steering techniques were required. I have considered the welfare state as a form of control in the spirit of Foucault, in the sense of it structuring a field of opportunities (Foucault, 1982). This has been about making the 'right' decisions within the frameworks that were formed within schools. These frameworks, which were based increasingly on talent, were decided upon during the construction of the welfare state. Talent was seen as crucial in determining which education and which position the individual would later be expected to take. Having different sorting systems in elementary schools could be seen as different forms of upbringing and was a way of steering pupils towards the 'right' occupation after school.

## Conclusions

To use a Foucauldian genealogical approach is to write a history of interpretations, or a history of problematizations. This together with a perspective of governmentality – the knowledge it invokes, the techniques it mobilizes, and the kind of subject it seeks to fabricate – can help us to understand our contemporaries and ourselves in different ways. Foucault (1988b) argues that we need to recognize the welfare state for what it is: a combination of political power exercised over legal subjects and pastoral power exercised over individual subjects. This complicated relationship between dominant discourses of power brings with it a fundamental contradiction between the welfare and care of individual lives and the upholding and maintenance of the exclusive status of citizenship. Who should belong to the flock and receive care and help, and who should be subject to the power of the state?

According to Foucault, knowledge and political power go hand in hand – they do not go their separate ways. But Foucault finds it less interesting to dwell on the State or on different actors' intentions. He distances himself from the idea that the State can be discussed as if it were a 'superhuman' actor with the same will and intentions as individuals. The State, no more probably today than at any other time in history, does not have this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality, nor, frankly, this importance. Maybe after all the State is no more than a composite reality and a mystical abstraction whose importance is far more limited than many of us might think (Foucault, 2008).

Previous research has pointed to the State's increasing influence over schools at the beginning of the twentieth century. This was also the case generally, but there was nothing that characterized the schools' categorization at a local level. The schools' formation was decided, less as a result of political decision at a national level and more as a result of different local decisions. In this context it is justifiable to speak about social engineering from below. Not infrequently decisions were taken in agreement with professionals such as doctors and elementary school inspectors. In schools that were established during the earlier part of the twentieth century new cultural norms became crucial for the separation of certain pupils. Many children began to be perceived as problematic in relation to the schools' institutional and social changes. Those pupils who were separated were those who could not live up to the schools' norms, mainly in respect of intellectual ability, but also regarding physical, moral and disciplinary norms.

At the same time one should be careful with individual intentions. The individual can, of course, have intentions, but this is not crucial for Foucault. From a

Foucauldian perspective, Binet's intentions, for example, are not of primary interest; the central thing is what happens in social practice and what consequences different configurations of power/knowledge have for different individuals and groups in society. Generally speaking, Foucault finds it difficult to see history as a consequence of people's deliberate intentions and acts of will. Instead, he emphasizes the contingency of history: history is a result of a number of occurrences, uncertainties, and random events (May, 2006).

Viewing history in a Foucauldian manner can help us to see that the present is just as strange as the past, and not to think that a sensible or desirable present has emerged or might emerge (Kendall & Wickham, 2003). Intelligence tests, which in the cases presented became a technique for defining talent as well as quality of citizenship, were used, and are still used today, together with other techniques to identify similarities and differences and to define who the individual is and what can be expected from him or her. Thus, for example, mental retardation came to be seen as a boundary between good, responsible citizens and the socially, morally, and intellectually 'incompetent'. Since different tests were seen as scientifically legitimate the drawing of boundaries could be accepted in a democratic society (Thomson, 1998). Together with democracy, intelligence tests became a way of decoding previous categories, yet were judged essentially to have the same effect on a particular individual and group. Or, as Cruikshank (1999) puts it, democratic citizenship is less about solutions to political problems than about a strategy of government.

The questions that have been discussed here are still of great importance. The educational system builds on the notion that pupils' abilities to utilize knowledge is to be reflected in the setting of grades and future careers, yet are at the same time a democratic right for everyone, whatever their background and individual conditions. Talent is a concept that is still used today – though not so openly, perhaps because it is connected to heredity. The new concepts, or diagnoses, are based, like talent, on biology. Within the school's framework, instruments and tools are being created that describe both the normal and the abnormal. This often takes the shape of different diagnoses, and it is often doctors and psychologists who are responsible for the separating technique in a new type of categorization of behaviour, giving expression to cultural notions and political ambitions.

The above shows that the tests tend to take a life of their own, and there is reason to be cautious and to adopt a higher level of humility when dealing with test results. Tests in general and IQ testing in particular are at imminent risk of stifling and suspending idiosyncrasies. As Ydesen (2011) puts it,

> The reason is that the attraction and allure of quantification is in perpetual danger of overruling human reservation when using test results. The temptation of comparing numbers with no thought as to reservations and sources of bias can be overwhelming. (p. 238)

Therefore, there is cause to be sceptical of the use of both political arguments and specific techniques, like supposed 'intelligence tests', to create categories.

Testing is a tool of power, although, according to Foucault (1984b), it is important to remind ourselves that this faceless power is not necessarily bad, dangerous or oppressive – just that it could be. A Foucauldian perspective need not be regarded as either a better or a worse way to relate to our history, but it reminds us that the writing of history also entails choosing events, facts, and perspectives. It is, therefore, a view of history that is not afraid to embrace perspectival knowledge. It is problematic when these categories – often with

biology as the determining argument – are seen as indisputable and impossible to discuss. This entails – as history has proved more than once – that these intelligence tests, whatever the design, will tend to move from descriptive diagnoses to determining forecasts. Something that seems to have completely disappeared in today's debate on placements in special schools is that these categories and boundaries are created in a social context. They should therefore be possible to challenge, negotiate, and change.

## References

Ahlberg, A. (2007). Specialpedagogik av igår, idag och i morgon [Special Education of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow]. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige* 2007, *12*(2), 84–95.

Axelsson, T. (2007). *Rätt elev i rätt klass: Skola, begåvning och styrning 1910-1950.* [*The Right Pupil in the Right Class: School, Talent and Governing 1910-1950*]. Linköping: Tema.

Axelsson, T. (2012a). Att konstruera begåvning – Debatten om IQ [The Construction of Giftedness – the IQ debate]. *Educare*, *1*(4), 7-28.

Axelsson, T. (2012b). Tattare, hjälpklasser och intelligensundersökningar i den svenska folkskolan under tidigt 1900-tal. [Tattare, Help Classes and Talent Measurement in the Swedish Elementary School in the early 1900s]. *Særklasse. Inklusion og eksklusion i grundskolen, 46. Årbog Selskabet for Skole- og Uddannelseshistoria, 46,* 95-117

Beronius, M. (1991). *Genealogi och sociologi: Nietzsche, Foucault och den sociala analysen* [*Genealogy and Sociology: Nietzsche, Foucault and Social Analysis*]. Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings bokförlag AB.

Broberg, G. & Tydén, M. (1996). Eugenics in Sweden: Efficient Care. In G. Broberg & N. Roll-Hansen (Eds.) *Eugenics and the Welfare State: Sterilisation Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland* (pp. 77-150). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Cruikshank, B. (1999). *The will to empower: democratic citizens and other subjects*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Dahlberg, G. (1936-1937). On the frequency of mental deficiency. Uppsala läkareförenings förhandlingar, NF, band 42.

Danziger, K. (1997). *Naming the mind: How Psychology Found its Language*. London: SAGE.

Dean, M. (1999). *Governmentality: Power and Rule in the Modern Society*. London: SAGE.

Deleuze, G. (1990). *Foucault* (E. van der Heeg, S.-O. Wallenstein, Trans.). Stockholm: Symposion förlag.

Ericsson, M. (2015). *Exkludering, assimilering eller utrotning? 'Tattarfrågan' i svensk politik 1880–1955,* [*Exclusion, Assimilation or Extinction? The Tattare Question in Swedish Politics 1880-1955*]. Lund: Lunds Universitet.

Foucault, M. (1980). Truth and Power. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977* (pp. 109–133). New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1981). The Order of Discourse. In R. Young (Ed.), *Untying the Text: A Post- Structuralist Reader* (pp. 48-48). Boston: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1982). The Subject and Power. In H. L. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (pp. 208-226). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1984a). Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (pp. 76-100). New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. (1984b). On the Genealogy of Ethics. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (pp. 340-372). New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. (1988a). Critical Theory/Intellectual History. In L. Kritzman (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other Writings 1977–1984* (pp. 17-46). London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1988b). Politics and Reason. In L. Kritzman (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other Writings 1977–1984* (pp. 17-46). London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1988c). On Power. In L. Kritzman (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other Writings 1977–1984* (pp. 96-109). London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1988d). The Return of Morality. In L. Kritzman (Ed.)*, Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other Writings 1977–1984* (pp. 242-254). London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1988e). The Political Technology of individuals. In L. H. Martin (Ed.), *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (pp. 16-49). London: Tavistock Publications.

Foucault, M. (1993). *Övervakning och straff:* Fängelsets födelse. [*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*]. Lund: Arkiv.

Foucault, M. (2004). *Sexualitetens historia: 1 viljan att veta*. [*The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* ]. Göteborg: Daidalos.

Foucault, M. (2008). Regimentalitet. [Governmentality]. In T. Götselius & U. Olsson (Eds.), *Diskursernas kamp/Michel Foucault* [*The Struggle of Discourses/Michel Foucault*] (pp. 183-204). Stockholm: Brutus Östlings bokförlag.

Foucault, M. (2010). *Säkerhet, territorium, befolkning: Collège de France 1977–1978* [*Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*]. Hägersten: Tankekraft förlag.

Gould, S. J. (1996). *The Mismeasure of Man* (revised and expanded). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Hjörne, E. & Säljö, R. (2008). *Att platsa i en skola för alla: Elevhälsa och förhandling om normalitet i den svenska skolan,* [*To Qualify in a School for all: Student Health Negotiation About Normality in Swedish Schools*]. Stockholm, Sweden: Norstedts.

Kendall, G. & Wickham, G. (2003). *Using Foucault´s Methods,* London: Sage

Larsson, J. (2005). Ordalek och styrningskonst [Playing with words and Governmentality]. *Historisk tidskrift, 125*(3), 441-449.

May, T (2006). *The philosophy of Foucault*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's

Myrdal, A. (1946). Kontanta barnbidrag kräver skärpt steriliseringslag? [Cash Child Support Requires Stricter Sterilization Laws]. *Tidskrift för Barnavård och Ungdomsskyd*, 2, 57.

Nilholm, C. & Björk-Åkesson, E. (Eds.) (2007). *Reflektioner kring specialpedagogik – sex professorer om forskningsområdet och forskningsfronterna.* [*Reflections on Special Education – Six Professors on Research and Research Fronts*]. (Vetenskapsrådets rapporteserie 5/2007). Stockholm, Sweden: vetenskapsrådet.

Nilsson, R. (2000). Den närvarande frånvaron eller i väntan på Foucault: En discussion om Foucault och den svenska historiedisciplinen. [The Present Absence or Waiting for Foucault: A Discussion on Foucault and the Swedish History Discipline]. *Historisk Tidskrift*, *129*(2), 183-206.

Nilsson, R. (2005). Postmodernism, källkritik och historieskrivning [Postmodernism, Source Criticism, and Historiography"] *Historisk Tidskrift*, *125*(2), 233-248.,

Nilsson, R. (2008). *Foucault – en introduktion.* [*Foucault – an Introduction*]. Malmö: Égalité.

Qvarsebo, J. & Axelsson T. (2015). Lutherans, People with Values or US Citizens? The ever present dream of the good citizen. In A. Fejes & K. Nicoll (Eds.) *Foucault and a Politics of Confession in Education* (pp. 146-152). London: Routledge.

Ohlander, M. (1943a). Begåvningsförhållandena hos tattare: En genealogisk och sociologisk studie [The Talent Conditions of Tattare: a Genealogical and Sociological Study]. *Tidskrift för Psykologi och Pedagogik* 3.

Ohlander, M. (1943b). Zigenare, tattare och hjälpskolan [Gypsies, Tattare, and Remedial School]. *Hjälpskolan: Organ för nordiskt hjälpskoleförbund.*

Rose, N. (1995). Psykologins blick [The Gaze of Psychology]. In K. Hultqvist & K. Petersson (Eds.), *Foucault: Namnet på en modern vetenskaplig och filosofisk problematik: Texter om maktens mentaliteter, pedagogik, psykologi, medicinsk sociologi, feminism och bio-politik.* [*Foucault: The Name of a Modern Scientific and Philosophical Problem: Texts about Power Mentalities, Education, Psychology, Medical Sociology, Feminism and Bio-politics*] (pp. 173-195). Stockholm: HLS förlag.

Rose, N. (1999). *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London: Free Press.

Skolinspektionen (2011) Särskolan: Granskning av handläggning och utredning inför beslut om mottagande [Special Schools: Review of Processing and Investigation prior to Decisions on Receipt], Regeringsuppdrag 31 januari 2011. Diarienummer 2010:2593

Sociala Meddelanden (1940), Socialstyrelsen. [The National Board of Social Welfare].

SOU 1936:31 *Betänkande med utredning och förslag angående åtgärder för särskild undervisning och utbildning av psykiskt efterblivna i barn- och ungdomsåren.* [*Report of investigation and proposals regarding measures for specific education and training of the mentally retarded in childhood and adolescence*].

Thomson, M. (1998). *The Problem of Mental Deficiency: Eugenics, Democracy, and Social Policy in Britain c. 1870–1959.* Oxford: Clarendon Press

Ydesen, C. (2011). *The Rise of High-Stakes Educational Testing in Denmark (1920-1970)* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang*.*

Zenderland, L. (2001). *Measuring Minds: Henry Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*.*