Critical dircourse analysis; analysis of social practice of child rearing

Life, Childhood

AELS 348 — CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS KIRSTIN CONRADIE 16107306 TASK 3 1. Social practice: Raising children 2. In contemporary society the discourse regarding the raising of children is primarily focused on developmental appropriateness, meaning that there exists a general awareness of the developmental sensitivity of children (childhood being a developmentally sensitive period). Contrasting this with the sentiment of " children must be seen and not heard" of a few decades ago, it becomes evident that our understanding of this practice is historical. In society today raising children is discussed along the lines of socialization, family life (the composition of the family), the specified medical field of paediatrics, child psychology, developmental psychology, education etc. There are certain actors taking part in certain activities that constitute rearing children, but because this is such an extensive social practice I cannot provide an exhaustive list. A core example would be; married couples becoming pregnant (obviously the woman falls pregnant and the husband plays a role therein), the child being born and the couple then providing physical and emotional care for this child. However, children can be put up for adoption, couples don't have to be married to have children and the conception of the activity of " care" is interpretable. Perhaps a good core role player would be the notion of a ' care-giver' provides the care to raise a child. In popular culture there has arisen an interest in the effective practice of discipline with regards to children, evidenced in television shows such as Oprah where discourses regarding ' problem children' confer techniques to better raise ' difficult' children. Words/diagnoses such as ADD or ADHD have become popular classifications for children who struggle to function in a classroom

context. There are very many discursive features regarding the practice of raising children, especially because childhood stretches over a long period from birth to adolescence, and even after adolescence, teenagers continue to stay with their parents until 18/21 years of age. Discourse regarding optimum development is perhaps most central to this social practice and ways of speaking and behaving that are appropriate to the context of child rearing are largely determined/influenced by this. Discursive features (ways of speaking and behaving that are appropriate to this context) of childrearing would be playing with one's child (going to day-care, taking part in play groups, purchasing toys) and feeding one's child (breastfeeding, purchasing baby-chairs for meal times, using bottles and baby food). It would be inappropriate to attend play groups and purchase baby food if one were not engaging in the practice of childrearing on some level. Socially, intellectually and physically, discourse is concerned with exploring the best ways of raising children. Again, contrast this with sentiments of previous decades where children were seen as little adults and often started to work at a very young age. Now the idea of age-appropriateness has become a determining feature of this discourse. Child rearing discourse is often concerned with adequate adaptation (and/or growth) to the social requirements of life and discourse about social alienation, cliques and bullies provide an example of this. 3. Theorist from Lemke's article: Foucault Foucault developed a historical theory interested in human cultural products and the change in their meaning over time with regard to how we frame them in discourse. These cultural products are seen as historical artefacts of text and discourse. Their meaning cannot be reconstructed in the present, but Foucault

theorized that the importance of interpretation lies in the analysis of how these textual, discursive artefacts differ from (and are similar to) those of the present. In this way, he sought to build a model for how we picture the past within the present and what the cultural, social value is of this process of change and differing. What he found interesting was that in the present we interact with multiple artefacts coming to us from different places and times in the past and that these past texts are combined by us to form a complex historical network of intertextuality. Herein lies the bridging of the gap between text and social systems, because society and its texts reciprocally mirror each other. Our cultural products (texts) are deeply enmeshed in our social systems (rules for the relationships/roles among social actors), thus discursive change mirrors cultural, social change which is systemic — meaning change is the product of multiple, complex interactions, not an individual's action. This is so because discursive formations form part of systems of action; discourse is socially constructed by multiple parties. In this way Foucault provides a complex, subtle account of social relationships and their histories in terms of discourse formations (Lemke, 1995). Now to go on to briefly describe how this theory encourages as broader understanding of the culture, social practice and discourse of child rearing: Firstly, taking a historical perspective on the social practice of childrearing would involve a consideration of the modern conception of the child. This would then be excavated in order to unpack the layered history of our understanding of children. The process of unpacking would involve various other social practices, such as marriage, divorce, adoption, and in a broader sense, socio-political change such as the advent of feminism, technology and

modern industrialized capitalism. These are various textual artefacts to which we currently attach meaning, but this meaning is contingent on the growth/development/change thereof. This discourse of childrearing is now placed within a broader historical context and its meaning can be explored on various levels, broadening our understanding not only of the current culture or discourse surrounding childrearing, but of the society in which this discourse is functional/finds meaning. References: Lemke, J . L. (1995). Textual politics: Discourse and social dynamics. London: Taylor and Francis