

**Exploring the Discursive Limits of “Suicide” in the Classroom: A Foucauldian-Inspired**

**Discourse Analysis of a School-Based Youth Suicide Prevention Program**

by

Jonathan Morris

Bachelor of Arts, Child and Youth Care  
University of Victoria, 2007

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Faculty of Human and Social Development

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**Supervisory Committee**

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**Departmental Member**

## **Abstract**

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Research into the phenomenon of youth suicide is typically guided by quantitative methodologies focused on young people who have attempted or died by suicide. Questions related to epidemiology, etiology, and the development of actuarial measures of risk are often the drivers of these particular kinds of research. Similarly, research into school-based youth suicide prevention curricula is predominantly focused on quantitative measures of the degree to which young people acquire knowledge or change attitudes about suicide, after exposure to a delivered program. Grounded in post-structural ideas, the purpose of this thesis is to expand upon these mainstream inquiries into youth suicide prevention education through close exploration and analysis of how “suicide” is discursively produced within the context of a classroom delivered curriculum. This study will pay particular attention to the discursive productions of suicide in the curriculum, as well as how these productions result in the constitution of particular objects, concepts, and subjectivities. Transcripts of “naturally occurring classroom talk” will serve as the site of analysis. Troubling contemporary “truth regimes” about suicide and its prevention through close analysis of the discursive frames by which they are produced offers up the potential of re-imagining new possibilities for thinking about and delivering youth suicide prevention education.

**Keywords:** youth suicide, prevention, education, post-structural analysis, Foucault

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my grandma, Louise.

## Chapter I: Introduction

*“We all remember what SOS stands for, right?” I ask the thirty students looking back at me. A student raises his hand. “Signals of Suicide?” I nod affirmatively, “Yes, you got it. Now if you notice that one of your friends is sending out an SOS, what would you do next?” The class sits quietly for a few moments. A student at the back of the class gingerly raises her hand and says, “I would probably ask them about it.” I nod even more affirmatively, “Absolutely, bingo. That’s probably one of the most important things to do if you’re worried that your friend is suicidal. What I’d like us to do now is practice asking The Question - Are you thinking about suicide? After three . . . one, two, three.” The students en masse ask the fictitious suicidal student, “Are you thinking about suicide?” Now let’s talk about what we should do next . . .*

Recently, I have been spending considerable time thinking about classroom moments like the one above, remembering how the phrases and words like “SOS” and “The Question” flowed out of my mouth with ease. I have delivered countless “Suicide Awareness for Youth” (SAY) presentations over the past eight years, and as a result, I developed a fluency with the particular language of youth suicide prevention work. Phrases like “signals of suicide,” “risk factors,” “don’t keep it a secret,” and “ask, listen, help,” have all become part of a naturalized discursive repertoire in my practice as a “youth suicide prevention educator.” Recently, however, I have started to stutter and reflect upon my use of this repertoire, largely due to my experiences as a graduate student and my close involvement with a larger research study ([White, Morris, & Hinbest, in press](#); [White & Morris, 2010](#)) documenting the experiences of educators like myself delivering youth suicide prevention programming. I have noticed a new flow in my youth suicide prevention practice, not a flow of taken-for-granted and untroubled phrases, but a flow of

wonderings and questions. What are the implications of describing a young person as “sending out an SOS” or “giving off clues of suicide?” Borrowing from post-structural thinking, in particular Foucauldian ideas, what subjectivities for this particular young person are constituted? How might those subjectivities constrain or limit? How did I arrive at a place of training classes of young people to ask “The Question,” as a means to inoculate against the fear of uttering the words, “Are you thinking about suicide?” should they find themselves concerned about a friend?

I have purposefully included a memory from my practice as an educator as a point of departure for my thesis. It provides a glimpse of my own history of being immersed and entangled with the complexities of walking into classrooms filled with young people to talk about “suicide<sup>1</sup>.” My experiences of immersion and entanglement help locate me as an “insider” to this research endeavour, an active participant in the discursive productions of suicide I hope to analyze and trouble, while I simultaneously attempt to hold an “outsider” stance in my efforts to engage in disciplined and systematic inquiry as a researcher. While the hybrid nature of my positioning as practitioner/researcher has been both destabilizing and invigorating, it also affords a unique intersection from which I can start to make links between my curiosity, research questions, and broader intellectual traditions and ideas that can help call into question the “taken-for-granted” and bring into relief and interrogate the “kinds of familiar, unchallenged, and unconsidered modes of thought [on which] the practices that we accept rest” (Foucault, as cited in [Marsh, 2010, p. 3](#)).

### **A Brief Introduction to the Study**

I will now take this opportunity to provide a synopsis of my study followed by an overview of the chapters contained in this thesis. Throughout this study, I used a discourse

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<sup>1</sup> In keeping with the philosophical/epistemological underpinnings of this thesis, “suicide” as it is discursively formed in this writing is contestable. Specifically, I have a commitment to not leaving “suicide” untroubled within the context of my own writing.

analytic to examine the naturally-occurring talk taking place during the implementation of a classroom-based youth suicide prevention program. Borrowing heavily upon Foucauldian notions of power, knowledge, discourse, and processes of objectification and subjectification, I attempted to explore discursive productions of suicide within the classroom context. The main objective of this study was to explore the discursive limits of how suicide was made *intelligible* within a classroom-delivered youth suicide prevention program. Youth suicide prevention efforts are embedded within complex power-to-knowledge and knowledge-to-power relations framed by dominant discourses of medicine, psychiatry, and epidemiology. The constituting and constitutive truth-effects of these framing discourses typically result in an individualized and pathologically-oriented approach to youth suicide prevention programming. I used a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analytic approach to help open up contemporary school-based youth suicide prevention to new forms of analysis with the anticipated potential of generating new ideas for practice.

This study focused upon a subset of findings collected within the context of a larger in-depth qualitative case study led by Dr. Jennifer White, assisted by this author (JM). The larger study is ongoing and has a similar purpose, focused on closely examining the social practices of planning and implementing a four-part (six hour) classroom-delivered suicide prevention program in one secondary school (Middletown Secondary), in Vancouver, British Columbia. The larger study collected data in the form of interviews with community educators, students, and school personnel, combined with video and audio recordings of the curriculum's delivery in the classroom. The suicide prevention program is designed to teach students about stress, warning signs for suicide, and ways to respond to a peer in suicidal distress through lecture, a DVD film,

and interactive group activities. My own study is an analysis of the classroom transcripts collected during the larger study.

### **Research Questions**

Several research questions supported my overall objective of exploring the discursive limits of suicide in the classroom. I discuss these in considerable detail in Chapter III, but for the purposes of orienting the reader, I also repeat them here. These questions link back to Foucault's notion of "problematization" (Rabinow & Rose, 1994, p. xviii). In the context of this study, problematization can be understood as an exploration of how discursive practices construct truths and in turn constitute "suicide" as an object of thought in this particular youth suicide prevention program.

The main research questions are as follows:

1. How is "suicide" most usually discursively formulated within the context of a classroom-delivered youth suicide prevention program?
2. How are the discursive formations of "suicide" produced and used throughout the program? Specifically, what do the discursive formations accomplish?
3. How might Foucault's "technologies of dominance" and "technologies of the care of the self" be applied to understanding the effects of the discursive formations?

### **Outline of Thesis**

In Chapter II, I describe the theoretical backdrop for this study. I clearly delineate how Foucault's ideas and concepts are informing my analytical approach, taking care to identify and articulate how I am interpreting key terms like discourse, power, and knowledge. While a substantive analysis of the phenomenon of suicide using Foucauldian ideas has already been undertaken elsewhere (see Marsh, 2010), based on my review of the literature this kind of

analytic has not been applied to classroom-based suicide prevention programming. Situating this chapter here allows me to foreground some of the analytical tools I use to critique the existing youth suicide prevention literature during the latter part of Chapter III.

In Chapter III, I provide a literature review of the youth suicide prevention literature with a focus upon classroom-based programming. I explore shifts in the role of “stress” and “mental illness” in the literature as they relate to the object of suicide. I highlight gaps in the mainstream literature, present several exemplars of qualitative and postmodern explorations of the phenomenon of youth suicide, concluding with how this inquiry is situated within existing research.

In Chapter IV, I present the approach to my inquiry. Specifically, I describe how I developed a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analytic strategy and my rationale. I provide an overview and discussion of my analytical questions and situate my analytic within broader conceptualizations of discourse analysis. I then turn to the methods of my study, giving consideration to data collection, research ethics, and my stages of analysis. Consideration of researcher reflexivity and reconceptualizations of “rigour” close the chapter.

In Chapter V, I present a series of excerpts from the transcripts of classroom talk from the final two modules of the youth suicide prevention program’s implementation. I use the excerpts as a site to present my discourse analytic approach which responded to the three research questions stated above. Based on my analysis of (a) the most usual discursive formulations of suicide, (b) their productivity, and (c) and their relationship to the technologies of dominance and care of self, I present several key findings. Suicide was most usually constituted as internal, private, hidden, medicalized, and indexed with pathology. These claims were produced with repeated reference to an objective scientific/medical body of knowledge. In relation to

technologies of dominance (objectification/subjectification), suicidal subjects were often made recognizable at the level of the body which I identify as “corporeal inscriptions of risk.” I also found that discursive work in the classroom helped maintain distance between suicidal and non-suicidal subjects, which helped hail the suicidal subject as Other. Finally, in relation to technologies of care of the self, I identify an interesting theme linking the suicidal subject and practices of confession.

In Chapter VI, I offer a summary of the results of the study in relation to my theoretical framework and the existing literature and discuss implications. I also discuss the limitations of the study and offer some questions for further inquiry.

## Chapter II: Theoretical Framework: Borrowing Upon Foucault

I wouldn't want what I may have said or written to be seen as laying any claims to totality. I don't try to universalize what I say . . . My work takes place between unfinished abutments and lines of dots. I like to open up a space of research, try it out, and then if it doesn't work, try again somewhere else . . . What I say ought to be taken as "propositions," "game openings" where those who may be interested are invited to join in; they are not meant as dogmatic assertions that have to be taken or left en bloc. (Foucault, as cited in [Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991, pp. 73-74](#))

All my books . . . are, if you like, little tool boxes. If people want to open them, use them, use a particular sentence, idea, or analysis like a screwdriver or wrench in order to short-circuit, disqualify or break up systems of power, including eventually the very ones from which my books have issued . . . well, all the better! (Foucault, as cited in [Milchman & Rosenberg, 2003, p. 12](#))

Borrowing from the intellectual work of Michel Foucault, my intent in this chapter is to describe and justify the theoretical resources underpinning the analytic strategy for my study. As illustrated by the guiding questions stated in the previous chapter, my inquiry is designed to examine the constitutive and disciplinary powers of the discursive practices particular to the context of a classroom-delivered youth suicide prevention curriculum, through the use of discourse analysis. However, it is with some apprehension that I declare my use of a Foucauldian-inspired methodology as part of my analytic strategy, both in terms of Foucault's stance against universalized and prescribed methodologies ([Tamboukou, 1999](#)), and in terms of the scholarly risk of not getting Foucault "right" in my attempt to sharpen the focus upon youth suicide prevention efforts in the classroom. Much of this methodological angst has been precipitated by several of the "buyer-beware" warnings throughout the literature, chastising researchers for caricaturing and misreading Foucault's tools of analysis, while spotlighting examples of allegedly *un*Foucauldian analyses e.g., shopping malls operating as panoptic spaces ([Kendall & Wickham, 1999](#)). Despite this somewhat risky theoretical terrain, Foucault's analytical tools of archeology and genealogy and his elucidations of discourse, power-

knowledge, and subjectification all offer up wrenches and screwdrivers to “denaturalize the . . . world and turn aspects of it into matters of reflection,” (Ransom, 1997, p. 4) and engage in the practice of critique “pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest” (Foucault, 1988, p. 154).

This chapter is an opportunity is to provide an exegesis of which analytical tools and ideas I plan to apply to the data, in turn laying out an analytic strategy that is designed to be inspired by and consonant with the work of Foucault. After a tracing of Foucault’s major bodies of intellectual work, I will turn to examine Foucault’s analytical methods of *archeology* and *genealogy*. It is important to note at this point for the reader that this study is *not* an attempt to conduct an archeological or genealogical analysis of youth suicide prevention education. Rather, I borrow from ideas that can be found within these methods to support my previously stated research objective. I include a comprehensive overview of both for the purposes of identifying which of those ideas are infused into my analysis. Next, I will pay particular attention to Foucault’s treatment of several notions including discourse, power-knowledge-truth, objectification and subjectification. It is important to note that the extant literature about Foucault takes up each of these notions in considerable depth and at times in contradictory ways. It can also be argued that each of these notions is contingent *and* flexible. While I intend to demonstrate my understanding of these ideas and how they might be applied to the particular data of this study, it is not my intent to provide an all-encompassing exposition of each in turn. Rather, these Foucauldian formulations will support my inquiry as “theoretical touchstones” helping to scaffold nodes of analysis as I proceed. Following a discussion of these areas I will close this chapter with an overview of my analytic strategy.

## Poststructuralism

Many attempts have been made to capture Foucault in an array of paradigmatic nets, in efforts to characterize his thinking and align it with a particular ontological and epistemological “home.” [Markula and Pringle \(2006\)](#) provide several examples of such attempts to pin Foucault down, highlighting Geertz’s assertion that Foucault was a “non-historical historian, an anti-humanist human scientist, a counter-structuralist structuralist” (p. 8), while [Peters and Burbules \(2004\)](#) include Piaget’s charge that Foucault was a “bad structuralist” (p. 17), borne out of concern that Foucault’s archeology of the human sciences would spell the end of “man” through its troubling of agency. Throughout his career, Foucault resisted these attempts to house him ontologically and epistemologically, declaring that he was neither a structuralist nor poststructuralist ([Peters & Burbules, 2004](#)), famously writing in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) “Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order” (p. 19). Despite Foucault’s reluctance to be made a “subject” of a particular intellectual or political tradition, it is still important for me to find an ontological and epistemological home to move forward from in the context of my own intellectual endeavour, at least for the time being. This home for now is poststructuralism. In the following discussion, I provide some orienting comments related to poststructuralism, with the caveat that poststructuralism is very much still a focus of speculation and contestation. It is also important to note the heterogeneity within poststructuralism itself and that there are differences between the poststructuralist ideas espoused by the philosophers identified below.

[Besley and Peters \(2007\)](#) help orient us to the philosophical movement of “poststructuralism” when they state:

Poststructuralism, as a specifically *philosophical* response to the alleged scientific status of structuralism - to its status as a megaparadigm for the social sciences - and as a movement which, under the inspiration of Frederick Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and others, sought to decenter the “structures,” systematicity and scientific status of structuralism, to critique its underlying metaphysics and to extend it to a number of different directions, while at the same time preserving central elements of structuralism’s critique of the humanist subject. (emphasis in original, p. 73)

Michel Foucault has been associated with this philosophical movement along with many of his contemporaries including Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Gilles Deleuze. [Peters and Burbules \(2004\)](#) in their work exploring poststructuralism and education, provide a broad survey of the theoretical tenets underlying poststructuralist thinking. A summary of their main points is provided here. First, they explain how thinkers like Foucault have in different ways emphasized how *meaning* is contingent upon *context* hence disrupting the universality of truth claims and structuralism’s attempt to ascertain and measure the “true” depth of entities. Second, poststructuralism as a philosophical movement has also troubled the Kantian-Cartesian humanist, rational, and autonomous subject, rather describing the subject as “*embodied and engendered*, physiologically speaking, as a *temporal* being . . . yet . . . also malleable, infinitely flexible, and subject to the practices of normalization and individualization.” (emphases in original, p. 19). Third, poststructuralism seeks to disrupt the pre-eminence of “scientific” knowledge and its production of “grand-narrative” truths, produced by the rational, autonomous, *and* objective humanist self. In turn, poststructuralism privileges “anti-foundationalism” in epistemology, disrupting the idea that there are fundamental principles underpinning knowledge and inquiry. Fourth, poststructuralism seeks to explore the construction

and reification of particular essentialized identities - e.g., gender, citizenship, and race - and tries to understand the formation of identity binaries and how they are regulated and maintained. This particular focus of poststructuralism has been taken up in the work of feminist poststructural scholars such as [Davies \(2000\)](#) and [Weedon \(1997\)](#) which will be discussed more fully in the upcoming section describing the production of the subject. Finally, [Peters and Burbules](#) offer up a caution against the frequent conflation of poststructuralism with postmodernism, arguing that there are critical differences between their “intellectual genealogies and their theoretical trajectories and applications” (p. 29), with each focusing on different objects of study i.e., modernism and structuralism. Having arrived at this juncture of the discussion, I will now turn to a brief (and limited) exploration of Foucault’s work.

### **Bumping into Foucault**

Despite Foucault’s rejection of being identified as a structuralist and even a post-structuralist, he did self-identify as fitting into particular philosophical traditions, naming his ongoing project *A Critical History of Thought* ([Besley & Peters, 2007](#)), a name he also applied to his research chair while at the College de France. Foucault’s analysis of a “critical history of thought” is linked to the notion of “problematization,” a key element of his historical methods of analysis and critical in separating his analytic from a “history of ideas” or a “history of mentalities” ([Rabinow & Rose, 1994](#)). [Foucault \(1984\)](#) provided his own explanation of a critical history of thought:

. . . an analysis of the conditions under which certain relations of subject to object are formed or modified, insofar as those relations constitute a possible knowledge [savoir] . . .  
 . In short, it is a matter of determining its mode of “subjectification” . . . and objectification. What are the processes of subjectification and objectification that make it

possible for the subject qua subject to become an object of knowledge [connaissance] as a subject? (p. 6)

Foucault (as cited in [Besley & Peters, 2007](#)) offered further clarification about the themes of inquiry over his career in this interview excerpt:

My objective . . . has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. My work has dealt with three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects . . . The first is the modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the statuses of sciences . . . In the second part of my work, I have studied the objectivizing of the subject in what I shall call “dividing practices” . . . Finally, I have sought to study - it is my current work - the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject. For example, I have chosen the domain of sexuality . . . Thus it is not power, but the subject, that is the general theme of my research. (p. 6)

Many contemporary commentators and researchers agree and divide Foucault’s intellectual work into three phases. [McHoul and Grace \(1993\)](#) suggest that the first phase focuses upon discourses and intellectual traditions/disciplines of knowledge; the second analyzes political forms of power and population control through disciplinary regimes; and the third explores a “theory of the self.” [Marsh \(2010\)](#) aligns each of these phases with Foucault’s major books and modes of analysis, starting with “archeological” works (*Madness and Civilization, 1967, The Order of Things, 1970, The Archeology of Knowledge, 1972, and The Birth of the Clinic, 1973a*), followed by “genealogies” (*Discipline and Punish, 1977, and The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, 1978*) and explorations of ethics and subjectivity (*The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure, 1985, and Volume III: The Care of Self,*

1986). The stage during which Foucault was writing archaeologies of knowledge is when Foucault is largely read and interpreted as a structuralist (Prado, 2006). Commentators suggest that Foucault weaved a typology of four interrelated “technologies” throughout his work that can be identified as (a) technologies of production; (b) technologies of sign systems; (c) technologies of power (or domination); and (d) technologies of the self (Hall, 2001; Rabinow & Rose, 1994). “Technology” can be interpreted as a “way of revealing truth” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 30). Markula and Pringle (2006) explain that Foucault’s exposition of technologies of power and dominance included study of the regulation of individual conduct and practices of classification, objectification, and normalization in the production of “docile” subjects. Docile subjects are “well-disciplined . . . [and] economically efficient, but politically obedient: bodies that [are] ideal for employment within the capitalist workforce” (p. 40). Foucault named this particular exercise of power as “discipline.” Besley and Peters provide explanation of technologies of the self, citing Foucault who described them as “operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” (p. 30) that people can complete individually or in collaboration with others to attain “. . . happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (p. 30). Besley and Peters identify practices of “confession” as an example of a technology in the care of the self. Finally, McHoul and Grace (1993) argue that despite the shifts in foci throughout Foucault’s work a persistent question is apparent throughout: the question of the ontology of the present. Foucault repeatedly can be seen asking throughout his work: “Who are we today?”

Foucault’s methodological approach to analysis, specifically of history, was to select a problem rather than a historical period (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). This idea links back to the concept of problematization introduced earlier in the discussion. To add some clarity to this, I include a quotation from an interview with Foucault who explained:

[Problematization] does not mean the representation of a pre-existent object nor the creation through discourse of an object that did not exist. It is the ensemble of discursive and non-discursive practices that make something enter into the play of true and false and constitute it as an object of thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc). (as cited in Rabinow & Rose, 1994, p. xviii)

Within the context of my own inquiry, I am *problematizing* contemporary practices of youth suicide prevention in a particular classroom context. Adapting the above quotation by Foucault, I can ask “How does the ensemble of *discursive* and *non-discursive* practices enter into the play of true and false and constitute *suicide* as an object of thought in the context of this particular program?” This links back to the overarching objective of my research study stated in Chapter I. Raising this kind of question does not in any way jeopardize my commitment to support young people to stay alive. As Rabinow and Rose (1994) encourage, my intent in uttering this kind of question is to engage in critical thought, to help reframe the practices of youth suicide prevention as a *question*, “whose formation and obviousness must itself be subject to analysis” (p. xix). As someone who has engaged in these same practices of youth suicide prevention for many years, I am not able to completely stand outside of them. At the same time, I am not completely embedded within without room to maneuver. I am able to:

Step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present . . . [youth suicide prevention] to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is the freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem.

(Foucault, as cited in Rabinow and Rose, 1994, p. xix)

Problematization is just one example of Foucauldian elements that I plan to pursue in my study. I am also seeking to examine the “status” of particular intellectual traditions e.g., psychiatry (as a branch of medicine) or psychology as they index with suicide in the youth suicide prevention curriculum. Practices of objectification, including classification, normalization, and dividing are also pertinent to my inquiry, particularly as they link to the identification of the “suicidal subject.” I also want to explore subjectification in terms of how someone might *turn themselves* into a suicidal subject and how that also might happen through the process of subjectification by others. I will now turn to discuss archeological analysis.

### **Archeology**

Archeological analysis has been described as a means to “help us to explore the networks of what is said, and what can be seen in a set of social arrangements . . . [to] find out something about the visible in ‘opening up statements’ and something about the statements in ‘opening up visibilities’” (Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p. 25). This idea can be applied to the visibility of the school classroom. The classroom helps produce statements about education, while statements about education can reciprocally help produce the visibility of the school classroom. Prado (2006) goes on to suggest that archeology is a means for understanding how particular “discursive practices” manufacture and perpetuate particular systems of knowledge, and that archeology is also concerned with “disciplinary discourse, expert pronouncements, and idioms” (p. 72). Foucault (1972) explained expert pronouncements in terms of “statements” and rules governing their distribution and promulgation, naming the systems of dispersion between groups of statements, and the statements themselves, a “discursive formation” (p. 41). Hence, archeology is concerned with how such statements result in the production of disciplines and the shaping of behaviour of participants within those disciplines. Archeological analysis also

concentrates upon examining “all disciplines with their accepted concepts, legitimized subjects, taken-for-granted objects, and preferred strategies, which yield justified truth claims (Dreyfus & Rabinow, as cited in [Prado, 2006, p. 72](#)).

However, as [Kendall and Wickham \(1999\)](#) assert, it is important to note that archeological research is non-interpretive, non-judgmental, and non-anthropological. This kind of analysis purports to provide a description of the consistencies, inconsistencies, and productions resulting from discursive formations, without concern for their truthfulness, meaning, or authorial location. [Prado \(2006\)](#) summarizes that while archeological research can show the similarities between knowledge systems, it also serves to diversify by (a) rupturing continuities between systems of knowledge and unsettling conventions; (b) splintering the givenness of a discipline’s contemporary and historical grounding; and (c) unearthing the “hidden, the obscure, the marginal, the accidental, the forgotten, the overlooked, the covered up, and the displaced” (p. 72). In other words, archeological analysis can help bring into relief frameworks of statements, concepts and objects that have been discarded, and compare them with frameworks that currently have prominence. This comparative aspect is taken up in my critique of the mainstream literature on suicide, when I focus upon the transformation from a framework that conceptually viewed youth suicide as a response to stress, *to* a framework that marks suicide as a direct consequence of a psychiatric disorder.

Borrowing upon the above descriptions of archeological analysis and guidance provided by [Kendall and Wickham \(1999, p. 26\)](#), these ideas can be applied to my own analysis of practices of youth suicide prevention. Specifically, such an analysis would assist in tracing the kinds of expert pronouncements made about the phenomenon of “youth suicide” and its “prevention.” An example of a pronouncement or statement might be: “The profile of a typical

suicide completer is a male who dies from a gunshot wound” ([American Association of Suicidology, \[AAS\], n.d., p. 3](#)). Archeological analysis would look to see how this statement might link with and be ordered with other statements and explore how such statements are dispersed or deployed e.g., from journal articles to fact sheets, in turn producing a discursive formation. It would also ask why this kind of statement is deployed more frequently than others e.g., “Males are more likely to die by suicide because of restrictive socio-cultural expectations of masculinity.” Deliberate consideration of the conditions that support the deployment of particular statements would also be part of this kind of analysis. This kind of statement when linked to others help produce subject positions which might include “expert” for someone speaking the statement or “at-risk” for males in the population. Resulting discursive formations can also produce an obviousness and naturalness of the “typical suicide completer.”

### **Genealogy**

As I mentioned earlier, some commentators have read Foucault as a structuralist during the earlier stages of his work, particularly when he was focused upon examining the formation of knowledge and discourse through his archeological analysis of the human sciences. In very simple terms, his earlier archeological analyses have been interpreted by some as structuralist because it appears to presuppose an objectivity and autonomy in the formation of knowledge and discourse, rendering discourse as unilaterally deterministic upon practices ([Prado, 2006](#)). [Dreyfus and Rabinow \(1983\)](#) argue that archeological analysis starts to take on structuralist assumptions when it becomes “deflected from an interest in the social practices that [form] both institutions and discourse to an almost exclusive emphasis on linguistic practices” (p. xii). Analysis of the relational nexus between knowledge and power had much less prominence in *Madness and Civilization* ([Foucault, 1967](#)) and *The Birth of the Clinic* ([1973a](#)), but started to

become Foucault's analytical focus in his lecture *The Order of Discourse* (Young, 1981), and much more salient in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) when Foucault started to pay particular attention to both power and the reciprocally constitutive effects of social practices upon discourse and vice versa (Marsh, 2010). This shift (not a break) in analytic priorities is well-exemplified by Foucault's statement during his lecture *The Order of Discourse* (as cited in Young, 1981, p. 52):

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.

Here, Foucault was speaking to the exercise of power through discourse, making mention of how social practices are exerting a constitutive effect upon discourse. As Dreyfus and Rabinow comment (1983, p. 104), Foucault was concerned with "that which conditions, limits, and institutionalizes discursive formations." In other words, Foucault's *The Order of Discourse* lecture appears to mark the point when Foucault started to develop an account of power and its relationship with knowledge and vice versa.

Genealogical analysis is the site where "truth, knowledge, and rationality [are] re-conceived as products of power" (Prado, 2006, p. 76), an observation supported by Tamboukou (1999) when she asserts that genealogical analysis offers up a configuration for reflecting upon the nature, development, and dispersion of modern power, naming the processes, procedures, and apparatuses by which truth and knowledge are produced as the "discursive regime of the modern era." Kendall and Wickham (1999) explain that genealogical analysis brings power into relief by conducting a "history of the present" (p. 34) which Tamboukou illustrates with two questions:

“What is happening now?” and “What is this ‘now’ within which all of us find ourselves?” (p. 202). [Kendall and Wickham](#) argue that genealogy also focuses upon uncovering “disreputable origins” (p. 34) of knowledge systems, a point that Prado opposes when he states that genealogy opposes itself to the search of “essential beginnings” (p. 76). Rather, as Foucault argued (as cited in [Prado, 2006, p. 77](#)):

[Genealogy] operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and copied many times . . . [and is] an attempt to identify the accidents, the minute deviations, the reversals, the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that . . . have value for us.

Foucault’s words help illuminate his genealogical project further, in that genealogy assists with identifying discontinuities, cracks, and mistakes in tracings of systems of knowledge hence rupturing the production and maintenance of reified grand narratives of the past predicated on a linear and uninterrupted progression of ideas. In summary, genealogy is an analytic tool that can be used to shine a light on contemporary discourses (e.g., youth suicide), tracing their palimpsest-like histories of “entangled and confused parchments” and the associated relationships between power, knowledge, and truth. As Foucault was known to have said several times in his writing and during interviews, the endeavour of tracing histories facilitates a diagnosis of the present.

So far in this chapter, I have attempted to elucidate some of the theoretical backdrop to my study. I have situated myself in a predominantly poststructurally-inspired space of inquiry, borrowing heavily upon the intellectual work of Foucault. I have spent the past several pages of my discussion illustrating Foucault’s linked archeological and genealogical projects because they both comprise much of the terrain I will be walking upon as I navigate my own questions about

the practices associated with classroom-based youth suicide prevention education. It is perhaps useful to remind the reader that my intention is not to complete a full Foucauldian-inspired archeological or genealogical analysis during my study. My main reason for this method-related decision is that Foucault does not provide a prescriptive or manualized method for completing archeological or genealogical analysis. As I alluded to earlier, a key observation (and criticism) of Foucault's work is that he does not employ distinct or discernible methodologies in his work (Tamboukou, 1999). My sense is that I will need several more years of Foucauldian scholarship to ensure I meet my commitments to not misread, misapply, or caricature Foucault's ideas if I were to embark on a fuller application of archeological or genealogical analyses. *However*, Foucault's treatment of discourse, power, knowledge, truth, objectification and subjectification all hold relevance for the analysis of my transcripts, *and* can all be traced back to Foucault's analytics of archeology and genealogy. Hence, my purpose in providing some coverage (albeit limited) of both of these analytics is to provide some theoretical context for these ideas, before I spend some time discussing each of them in turn. My aim is to be explicit about the Foucauldian-influenced ideas I am selecting for use in my study as I deliberately and carefully craft and justify my own analytic strategy.

### **Discourse**

Discourse is slippery. In the current literature, "discourse" is often interpreted in multiple ways and used interchangeably to mean "language," "speech," "narrative," "ideology," or "framework" (Garrity, 2010). Indeed Foucault's use and application of discourse changes throughout his own work, at times in contradictory and perplexing ways. For the purposes of this study, I intend to focus my discussion upon Foucault's articulation of discourse in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972), applying his explanation of discourse from a particular

moment of time. This rendering of discourse will be germane to the development of my overall analytic strategy. My decision to focus on this selected interpretation of discourse is partly in response to [Garrity's \(2010\)](#) call to “. . . use the term ‘discourse’ and the method of discourse analysis [as part of a] rigorous methodology in order to prevent them from becoming an eclectic bag containing fragments of conflicting theories without explanation as to how they might be woven together” (p. 200). My intent here is to continue the process of scaffolding an analytic strategy that is both rigorous *and* conceptually congruent.

[Garrity \(2010\)](#) interprets Foucault's archeological description of discourse as being less concerned with what is being said and more concerned with the conditions that have made it possible to speak of anything at all. As I noted in my earlier discussion of archeological analysis, Foucault employed a range of different terms in his efforts to elucidate “discourse” in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972). Foucault started at the level of “statements” which, when referring to the same object e.g., suicide, tend to form a group. These statements provide the means for an object, like suicide, to be “manifest, nameable, and describable” (p. 46). Analysis attempts to map the object's manifestation through “surfaces of emergence” which Foucault described as an array of domains including the family, workplace, social group, and religious community. Surfaces of emergence propagate particular categories of description, the ascription of different kinds of object-status, and contain particular authorities who have the capacity to designate, specify, divide, and classify a particular object. Foucault explained that statements can take different forms and be arranged temporally in contrasting ways. Specifically, the object itself and the groups of statements referring to the object are contingent, discontinuous, and are not ahistorical. As an example, [Marsh's \(2010\)](#) genealogical work provides a detailed tracing of how suicide as an object in ancient Rome differs to suicide as an object in the 1800s and the

present day. Further, suicide can be different as an object in psychiatric, police, legal, educational, or familial spaces. [Foucault \(1972\)](#) states:

It would certainly be a mistake to try to discover what could have been said of madness at a particular time by interrogating the being of madness itself, its secret content, its silent, self-enclosed truth; mental illness was constituted by all that was said in all the statements that named it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its developments, indicated its various correlations, judged it, and possibly gave it speech by articulating, in its name, discourses that were to be taken as its own . . . we are not dealing with the same madmen. (p. 35)

In respect to these contingencies, [Foucault \(1972\)](#) drew attention to the “interplay of . . . rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time,” (p. 36) and introduced the idea of a “discursive formation” composed of a group of statements, the relationships between the statements, and the rules for their dispersion or promulgation. [Hook \(2001\)](#) makes the link between these discursive rules, the exercise of power, and our complicity in their constitution which helps ensure the reproduction of a particular social system through forms of selection, exclusion, and domination. This is an echo of Foucault’s urging to “conceive discourse as a violence that we do to things, or, at all events, as a practice we impose upon them” (as cited in [Young, 1981, p. 67](#)). Foucault argued that there must be some materiality to the statements, and as such they might be written, spoken, or construed within space. A classroom can be interpreted as a discursive formation in its arrangement of desks and chairs and the spatial locations of student and teacher bodies. As an example, [Besley and Peters \(2007\)](#) take up the “space and body politic” (p. 71) in their own Foucauldian-inspired educational research. An important note to consider here is that Foucault emphasized that statements go beyond the

limitations of language where “a statement is always an event that neither language - nor the meaning - can quite exhaust” (as cited in [Garrity, 2010, p. 201](#)). Rather than discourse translating reality into language, discourse plays a role in structuring conceptualizations of reality ([Mills, 2004](#)). [Hook \(2001\)](#) in his critique of discourse analysis as conducted by [Parker \(1992\)](#) and [Potter and Wetherell \(1987\)](#) takes up both of these points, but emphasizes that analysis of discourse should not be overly concerned with searching for essential meanings. Rather it should be concerned with searching for *scarcity* of meaning in what cannot be spoken or written in a particular discursive space, defined as a process of “rarefaction” by Foucault in *The Order of Discourse* (as cited in [Young, 1981](#)).

My plan is to take up subjectification in a separate thread of discussion, but it is fitting to make some preliminary reference to it here in the context of discourse. In keeping with poststructuralism’s overarching contesting of the rational, reasoning, coherent, and bounded humanist subject, Foucault (as cited in [Garrity, 2010](#)) posited that the speaking or writing subject is not the inventor of the statement they produce. A non-authorial relationship exists between the subject and the statement, but the statement discursively positions the subject as its “enunciator” or audience. Britzman (as cited in [Maclure, 2003](#)) offers up a clarifying statement about the subjectifying effects of discourse:

Every discourse constitutes, even as it mobilizes and shuts out, imaginary communities, identity investments and discursive practices. Discourses authorize what can and cannot be said; they produce relations of power and communities of consent and dissent, and thus discursive boundaries are always being redrawn around what constitutes the desirable and the undesirable and around what it is that makes possible particular structures of intelligibility and unintelligibility. (p. 175)

The role of discourse in creating subject positions links to what Foucault identified as “enunciative modalities” which help explain how the statements that are referring to particular objects are themselves made. Analysis at this level would seek to ascertain the speaking or writing subject, the location from where the statements are being produced, and the relationship between the subject and the object. These linkages are predicated upon the assumption that for particular statements to be produced, the enunciator and audience must be positioned in particular ways. [Garrity \(2010\)](#) links this assumption to questions of who is sanctioned to be taken seriously and who can claim to be the knower of the “truth.” However, as Garrity and other commentators have noted, the idea that the subject does not originate or invent statements, and that the subject itself is potentially created through discursive practices, leaves the problem of agency and the complexities of the “inside” and “outside” of discourse. Foucault (1972) responded to this quandary by urging an understanding of all the ideas detailed so far as “[Constituting] the set of conditions in accordance with which a practice is exercised,” (p. 230) *not* as a set of outside rules forced upon an individual’s thinking or a set of rules that exists in advance on the inside. Foucault has named these as the *conditions of possibility* for discursive formation and its associated knowledge. Foucault also stated that he wanted to “. . . define the positions and functions that a subject could occupy in the diversity of discourse,” (p. 221) and entertained the possibilities of changing discourse while “. . . [depriving] the sovereignty of the subject of the exclusive and instantaneous right to it” (p. 230).

Amidst all of the complexity and nuance of Foucault’s treatment of discourse, it is apparent that (a) discourse operates through discursive formations comprised of groupings of statements carrying some constancy (which are historically and contextually contingent); (b) discourse goes beyond the limits of language and essential meaning; (c) discursive formations

are productive in that they can constrain and enable action and make un/available arrays of subject positions; and (d) discourse can be conceptualized in terms of “dominant” and “resistive”. This last point is underscored by [Young’s \(1981\)](#) observation that discourses’ effects are “. . . to make it virtually impossible to think outside them. To think outside them is, by definition, to be mad, to be beyond comprehension and therefore reason” (p. 48). Thus, while it is virtually impossible to think outside of discourse, occupying subject positions within more resistive forms of discourse allow for the possibilities of critique and resistance.

It is perhaps useful to summarize how the theoretical points I have discussed so far might *influence* an inquiry into the object of suicide. To be clear, I do *not* intend to pursue each of these points during the course of my analysis in this study. I include them here for the purposes of illustration and clarification around a Foucauldian treatment of discourse. To achieve this, I draw from the points I have presented in this summary in conjunction with concise yet comprehensive overviews of Foucault’s notion of discourse provided by [Hall \(2001, p. 73\)](#), [Kendall and Wickham \(1999, p. 42\)](#), [Marsh \(2010\)](#), and [Willig \(2008\)](#). Discourse in the context of youth suicide prevention education can be thought of in terms of:

- Discursive formations of “suicide,” comprised of relationships between groups of statements dispersed in different ways, in turn providing particular kinds of knowledges about “suicide”;
- The rules underpinning the production of statements i.e., rules of dispersion;
- The rules which prescribe and delimit what is sayable/unsayable, visible/invisible, and thinkable/unthinkable at this particular time in history, including the rules that create spaces for the production and dispersion of new statements about suicide;

- The subjects produced in relation to the object of suicide and the availability/unavailability of subject positions and the ways in which their actions are constrained/enabled;
- The “truth games” of the knowledges associated with discourses of suicide and their accrual of authority and truth-status at this particular time in history;
- The practices within particular institutions (e.g., the school) for interacting with the subjects produced through discursive formations of suicide;
- The rules that ensure a practice is both material i.e., spoken, written, spatial, and discursive at the same time. For example, school practices are predicated on discourses of education and the materiality of classrooms and school life.

### **Power, Knowledge, Truth.**

Foucault’s treatment of discourse cannot stand outside of consideration of how he conceptualized power, knowledge, and truth. During this next section, I briefly consider the relationship between power and knowledge, again with the limitation that I am undertaking only a partial exploration of Foucault’s notion of power, caught at a particular moment in history.

A useful starting place is perhaps Foucault’s famous formulation that power is not something possessed by one group of people at the top of a hierarchy to be used as a means of repression upon groups of people below. Rather, Foucault wrote about power as being (a) *not* always constraining, repressive, or negative; (b) productive; and (c) as something operating within the relationships between people and institutions (Mills, 2004). Foucault (as cited in Mills, p. 35) argues that, “power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain . . . power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization . . . individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of

application.” Extending this statement further, Foucault also argued that power is “omnipresent” forming a “capillary-like network that ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions . . . without being exactly localized in them,” (1978, p. 93) and “traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (as cited in Marsh, 2010, p. 17). Looking at these statements, there is a dispersion of power, it is exercised/resisted at the site of the subject, and that there is potential to conceive a “co-active” production of power between individuals and groups of people.

How do these conceptions of power operate in relation to knowledge and truth? Hall (2001) responds to this question by suggesting that Foucault implied that knowledge and power are intimately related and that power is intrinsic to whether particular knowledges are applied or not. Hall posits that Foucault gave primacy to the “effectiveness” (p. 76) of power-knowledge rather than any questions of its truth. These ideas link back to the rules within a discursive formation that govern what is sayable and visible where power is the strategy underpinning these rules (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). The linkages between knowledges and power have material implications for the “truth-status” of those same knowledges and in Hall’s words have the “power to make [themselves] true.” (p. 76) As Foucault wrote in *Discipline and Punish* (1977, p. 27), “There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations.” Building on the work of Marsh (2010), the complex and dispersive interplay between power, knowledge, truth, and discursive formations all have material effects upon the object of “suicide,” the subjects produced in relation to “suicide,” and how we identify it, name it, monitor it, and treat it. Particular discursive formations, amidst power relations, can sustain “regimes of truth” about suicide which Foucault illustrated when he said:

Truth isn't outside power . . . Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned . . . the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (as cited in [Hall, 2001, p. 77](#))

In the particular socio-cultural and historical context imbuing this study, there is a "general politics" of truth in relation to suicide, within which particular types of discourse are accepted and function as "truth." Systems of knowledge have produced means to measure and determine the veracity of statements about suicide, constructing truisms and falsehoods and arguably there are specially sanctioned individuals enabled to assign "truth-status" to such statements.

### **Technologies of Dominance: Objectification, Dividing Practices, Subjectification**

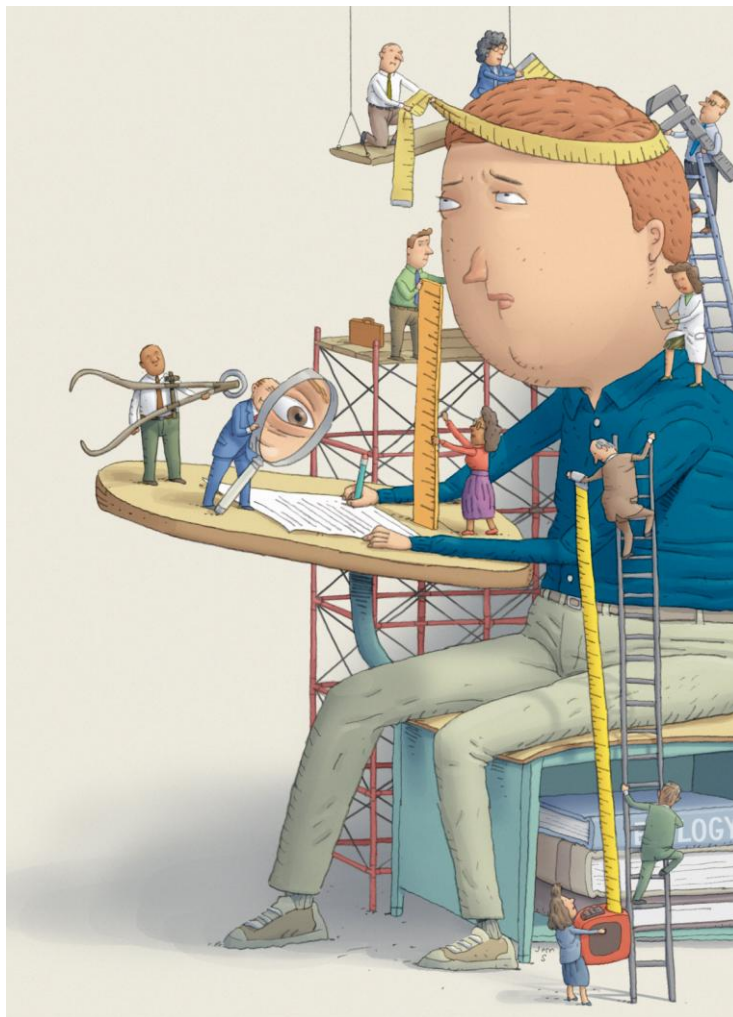
Technologies of dominance form one aspect of Foucault's typology of four interrelated technologies. I intend to focus specifically on three elements: (a) objectification, (b) dividing practices, and (c) subjectification as they relate to power-knowledge, truth, and discourse.

Foucault's understanding of power as deployed and exercised through capillary-like networks implicates *all* of us in its circulation with its reach extending into every aspect of social life ([Hall, 2001](#)). The broad and expansive reaches of power, and its relationships with knowledge and truth, have productive effects at these sites of social life. For example, psychiatry is an example of a power-knowledge nexus that has yielded texts of diagnosis and classification (e.g., DSM-IV-TR), pharmacological interventions for the control of mood (e.g., anti-depressants), instruments of screening (e.g., suicide risk assessments), policies and protocols for

the monitoring and surveillance of individuals deemed to be “at risk” (e.g., Q15 “suicide-watch” checks for inpatients), among many more examples. In Hall’s words, these productive effects of power are exemplars of the “. . . many localized circuits, tactics, mechanisms, and effects through which power circulate,” (p. 77) which Foucault identified as the “meticulous rituals” or “micro-physics of power.” The micro-physics of power operating at local levels has been described by Hacking (as cited in [Prado, 2006, p. 75](#)) as existing “. . . from the ground up, at the level of tiny local events where battles are unwittingly enacted by players who do not know what they are doing,” in the sense of not knowing “what they do does,” (Foucault, as cited in [Prado, 2006, p. 75](#)). As I have alluded to previously, rather than controlling individuals, power *constrains* and *enables* possibilities for action, which Foucault argued takes place at the site of the *body*. Specifically, he posited that the body is at the nexus of power-knowledge relations. The following excerpt from *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* ([Foucault, 1991](#)) helps to explain this idea:

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body. (p. 83)

Foucault takes up the notion of inscription here, situating the body as a site upon which an array of discourses are written and performed. Hence, the body is the site of application of disciplinary or regulatory power through particular discursive formations and apparatuses. Here is where Foucault applied his idea of “objectification,” (processes of scientific classification), which produce particular kinds of knowledge that people are subject to.



**Figure 1. Cover page for *Phi Delta Kappan* (May 2009).** While the artist’s original intent is unknown, this image offers a visually rich rendering of “scientific classification technologies.” © 2010 by Jem Sullivan. Reprinted with permission.

Many of the products of power identified above (e.g., the DMS-IV-TR, instruments of screening) can be considered to be examples of scientific classification technologies, and when used in conjunction with socially produced categories and statistical analyses, help form universalized groups that individuals can be divided into. The practice of classification and division links to another mode of objectification known as “dividing practices.” According to [Madigan \(1992\)](#) dividing practices can be both social and spatial, manifesting through the

objectification and separation of individuals who are identified as aberrant from “normal.” Here the “constituted subject” is simultaneously caught between objectification and constrained action (Rabinow, 1984). It is important to note that these practices are sanctioned by the regimes of truth associated with particular systems of knowledge. Dividing practices can be traced historically while some contemporary examples might include physically confining individuals identified to be “mentally ill” or creating social constructions of desirability in relation to body size. The body as a site for inscription of discursive formations of power-knowledge (regimes of truth) linked to “thinness” and “desire” is especially pertinent in the latter example.

I will now turn to one other effect of technologies of dominance: subjectification. I have repeatedly referred to the “subject” and “subjectification” throughout my discussion, but I have yet to provide a fuller explanation of how Foucault treated these ideas in his analytics. Subjectivity is an integral element of Foucault’s formulations of the power-knowledge nexus and discourse (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Consistent with the broader themes of the poststructuralist movement, Foucault was critical and suspicious of the autonomous, bounded, rational, and coherent humanist subject. The “humanist subject” can be thought of as a model of understanding persons as possessing a “fundamental essence” (Davies, 2000, p. 55) where language is used to “. . . learn about and later to describe or analyze the self and the real world in which it finds itself” (p. 57). In very simple terms, the humanist subject believes it *is* what it hears itself speak (Hall, 2001). Foucault went on to argue that discourse, not the subject, is the producer of power-knowledge. The subject itself is the product. As I noted earlier, criticism has been leveled at this repudiation of the “sovereign subject” because it is read as making the notion of agency ambiguous.

Turning to Foucault's later writing, he appears to provide further emphasis on a person's active role or agency in the process of subjectification. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume II* (1985), Foucault commented on the shifts in his own thinking and said, ". . . I felt obliged to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self, and the forming of oneself as a subject" (p. 6). Rabinow (1984) in his commentary on Foucault's work contrasts "subjectification" with scientific classification and dividing practices. Specifically, he notes that the person classified through analytical measures and subsequently separated off is in a "passive and constrained position," while in subjectification Foucault is focused upon "those processes of self-formation in which the person is active" (Rabinow, 1984, p. 11). During these later writings, Foucault was attempting to create a means for analyzing the aspects of discourse that have an influence on our "relation to ourselves" in response to this question: "How do we relate to ourselves as selves of a certain kind?" In other words, how do subjects recognize themselves as subjects? Foucault's work can be interpreted as suggesting that subjects' actions happen within the context of discourse, while simultaneously subjects are produced by discourse. The "subject itself is the effect of a production, caught in the mutually constitutive web of social practices, discourses, and subjectivity; its reality is the tissue of social relations" (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984, p. 117).

The contributions of feminist poststructuralist scholars (e.g., Davies, 2000; Davies & Gannon, 2005; Weedon, 1997) can also help to augment understandings of subjectification. Building upon Foucault's proposition that the capillary network of power makes certain subject positions available and unavailable, feminist poststructuralism suggests that power also makes particular subject positions *desirable* so that subjects want to take them up on their own (Davies & Gannon, 2005). While the subject is externally inscribed, the subject also takes up the "values,

norms, and desires that make her into a recognizable, legitimate member of her social group” (p. 318). Once in a particular subject position, particular discursive repertoires become available from that vantage point (Davies & Harré, 1990). Feminist poststructuralism is presenting a particular notion of agency here that Davies and Gannon summarize as:

[A] recognition of the power of discourse, a recognition of one’s love of, immersion in and indebtedness to discourse, and also a fascination with the capacity to create new life-forms, life-forms capable of disrupting old meanings . . . potentially overwriting or eclipsing them. (p. 319)

Much more could be included here on Foucault’s treatment of subjectification and subject positions, but my intent here is to provide enough information about the broader theoretical scaffolding of technologies of dominance as it contributes to my own theoretical framework. Objectification and subjectification represent one aspect of Foucault’s thinking about the practices through which humans constitute themselves and are constituted. What I would like to turn to now is some consideration of another technology of domination that Foucault called “a biopolitics of the population” (Foucault, 1978, p. 139).

### **Bio-Politics and Social Surveillance Medicine**

Mitchell Dean (2010), a leading thinker in studies of governmentality describes “bio-politics” in the following way:

Bio-politics is a politics concerning the administration of life, particularly as it appears at the level of populations. It is concerned with matters of life and death, with birth and propagation, with health and illness, both physical and mental, and with the processes that sustain or retard the optimization of the life of a population. Bio-politics must then also concern the social, cultural, environmental, economic and geographic conditions

under which humans live, procreate, become ill, maintain health or become healthy, and die.” (pp. 118-119)

It can be argued that the exercise of governmental power across each of these sites is often done with the intentions of promoting health and ensuring longevity of life. It has also manifested in the classification, division, and at times destruction of people considered a threat to the optimization of a population (Dean, 2010). The systematic sterilization of individuals deemed to be “feeble-minded,” the Holocaust, and warfare have all been cited as examples of governmental bio-power. Foucault developed the notion of bio-politics that he applied to sexuality in terms of both corporeal discipline and population regulation (Markula & Pringle, 2006). Sexuality’s intersection at a bodily and population level manifests in surveillances, control and regulation, medical and psychological examination, and micro-applications of power at the level of the body. This results in the production of new subject positions, legislation, policy interventions, moral campaigns, and population-based surveys. It is possible to imagine bio-politics might be applied to the social problem of “suicide.”

In the early 20th century, public health authorities started to collect vast amounts of epidemiological data to generate risk profiles across a series of social problems including mental health, addiction, and crime (Nadesan, 2008). Epidemiological medicine gradually became more visible, legitimized, and institutionalized, inspired by practices of population surveillance, statistical models, and “riskfactorology” (see France, Freiberg, & Homel, 2010; Wishart, Taylor, & Shultz, 2006). Nadesan highlights the mutually constitutive effect between risk factors and profiles and the subsequent development of further mechanisms of population surveillance leading to the formation of a less distinct or individual subject subsumed within population level risk statistics. In other words, disease and disorder started to become population-located objects.

Population surveillance practices like screening have also seen the proliferation of population-level public health interventions including “literacy” and education campaigns. Family physicians, social workers, teachers, and other professionals assume the role of surveillance agents and are tasked with providing educational information and, if necessary, interventions. Of note is the backdrop of capitalism and its requirement for a “healthy, skilled, educated, but also docile population in order to have a productive workforce and an efficient economy” (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 47). Disease cost calculators, return-on-investment analyses, and “business cases” have all been employed to help justify the need for healthy populations. Fullagar (2003) applies this idea when she makes the link between discourses of capitalism, waste, actuarial measures of risk, and youth suicide. Despite these practices of governing conduct, and enlisting individuals to help govern others’ conduct, it is the individual who ultimately needs to take responsibility and manage their own health to mitigate costs and a problem of “self-care” (Lemke, as cited in Teghtsoonian, 2009, p. 29).

### **Confessional Practices**

Earlier in this chapter, I provided a quote from Foucault to help explain the latter of his four technologies, “technologies of the self.” Confession is an example of one of these technologies. Rose (1996) in his seminal work, *Inventing our Selves* draws attention to the ways in which “psychological languages and judgments graft themselves into the ethical practices of individuals” (p. 95). Rose explains this as an examination of the ways in which people will engage in practices of self-evaluation (e.g., good/bad, true/false, allowed/disallowed) within ethical practices designed to further the “self-improvement project.” In a genealogy of the confessional self, Besley and Peters (2007) explain that confession has taken several forms, from its religious incarnations of admitting sin to another, to the confessional of the psychotherapeutic

relationship. Opportunities to confess are often found in screening tools and questionnaires. An example related to youth suicide prevention education would be the tickable box on the post-workshop evaluation form that says: “I am considering suicide and I would like to talk with somebody.” Arguably, the ongoing conduct of our lives has increasingly been influenced by what Rose calls the “*techne of psychology*” characterized by:

The truthful rendering into speech of who one is and what one does . . . [and] the confessing subject is *identified*. The “I” that speaks is to be - at least when “insight” has been gained - identical with the “I” whose feelings, wishes, anxieties, and fears are articulated . . . one is attached to the work of constructing an identity . . . [and] when the subject is affiliated to such an identity project, he or she is bound to the languages and norms of psychological expertise. (emphases in original, p. 96)

Extending these ideas further, the confessing subject is not only bound to the “languages and norms of psychological expertise,” but their confession needs to be heard by an interpreter, where the “revelation of confession [has] to be coupled with the decipherment of what is said” (Foucault, 1978, p. 66). This seems to imply that there are specially sanctioned individuals capable of listening to and comprehending particular confessions, who in turn provide a helping hand in the conduct of lives, which all might be likened to Loseke’s (2003) notion of a “troubled persons industry.” Is it arguable that practices of confession circulate through contemporary youth suicide prevention programming? If staying alive is the ultimate care of the self, interpretations of confessional practices are particularly relevant.

### **Chapter Summary**

I have taken this chapter as an opportunity to carve out the theoretical terrain upon which my study is based. I have identified poststructuralism as my study’s “epistemological home,”

leaning heavily on the intellectual resources afforded by Michel Foucault's renderings of "discourse," "power-knowledge," "truth" and his typologies of technologies of dominance and care of the self. Throughout, I have drawn attention to some of the framing epistemological assumptions of my study, which are anti-foundationalist, suspicious of the humanist subject, and view discourse, power, social practices, and subjectivity as mutually constitutive and productive through their material effects. In turn, I have identified the threads of Foucault's work pertinent to the course of my inquiry and outlined the beginnings of my "theoretical decision trail" (Cheek, 2004, p. 8). During the next chapter, I turn to a review of the youth suicide prevention programming literature. I draw upon the mainstream program evaluation literature and some relatively nascent poststructural research examining the phenomenon of "youth suicide." I document a shift in how the object of "suicide" is referred to in the literature and highlight the potential for this study to make a unique contribution to the knowledge base.

### **Chapter III: Review of the Youth Suicide Prevention Literature**

The purpose of this initial review is to identify and describe some of the key studies and findings in the mainstream literature published since 1985 related to school-based youth suicide prevention programming. Another purpose is to identify key studies and findings that fall outside of the positivist traditions of youth suicide prevention research. While an examination of “program effectiveness” is not the primary focus of this particular study, some note of the equivocal nature of findings situated within the research paradigms of “program evaluation” and “evidence-based practice” will be made. What is of particular interest in the broader context of this research study is the question of how suicide is most usually discursively framed or formulated in the youth suicide prevention literature. In other words, “What are held to be contemporary truths of suicide?” (Marsh, 2010, p. 23)

A brief scan of the literature underscores the multidisciplinary nature of youth suicide prevention practice so a cross-section of databases were identified and searched. These included: Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Social Sciences Index, Web of Science, Medline, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, and ERIC. Search terms included *youth, adolescent, teenager, suicide, prevention, high-school, curriculum, and program*. The search was limited to empirical studies published between 1985 and 2010.

#### **Mainstream Program Evaluation Literature**

The mainstream suicidology literature is abundant with examples of quantitative studies examining the epidemiological, etiological, and actuarial (risk) dimensions of the phenomenon of youth suicide (Beautrais, 1996, 1997; Berman, 2006; Cash & Bridge, 2009; Gould, King, & Greenwald, 1998; Gould, Greenberg, & Velting, 2003). It is apparent that considerable research

attention has been focused upon the incidence of suicide among young people compared to other age groups (Hawton & van Heeringen, 2000), which has been linked to suicide being identified as the second leading cause of death (after traffic accidents) of young people aged 15 to 19 in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009), and the resulting magnitude of potential years of life lost (Shiner, Scourfield, Fincham, & Langer, 2009).

A similar scope of research inquiry has been extended to investigate the types, safety, and efficacy of youth suicide prevention programs since their introduction into school-based settings in the 1980s. Miller, Eckert, and Mazza (2009) suggest that “universally-targeted programs” continue to typify the approach most widely used in schools. These kinds of program tend to have several goals including: (a) raising awareness about suicide; (b) disseminating information about risk factors and warning signs of suicide; (c) allaying myths and misconceptions about suicide; and (d) teaching young people strategies to identify and respond to peers potentially at risk of suicidal behaviour. Universal programs are directed toward *whole* school populations and are guided by several assumptions, including the observation that young people in distress are more likely to reach out to a peer than an adult and that there are preventive benefits to educating young people about how they can recognize and refer their peers to appropriate community resources (Kalafat, 2003). The program under analysis for the purposes of this study would be considered to fit into the “universal” category of prevention programs. Recent articles provide both a detailed tracing of the development of school-based youth suicide prevention education (White & Morris, 2008; White et al., in press) and an updated comprehensive evaluative review of programming from a public health perspective (Miller et al., 2009). A consolidation of their findings is provided in the table below.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Findings Related to School-Based Youth Suicide Prevention Programs (1980-2010)*

Findings	Authors
Concerns about program safety linked to observations of maladaptive attitudes and increased distress amongst some students after participating in program	Overholser, Hemstreet, Spirito, & Vyse, 1989; Shaffer, Garland, Vieland, Underwood, & Busner, 1991
Participant reports of knowledge acquisition and/or positive attitudinal shifts toward suicide and/or help-seeking	Abbey, Madsen, & Polland, 1989; Aseltine & DiMartino, 2004; Ciffone, 1993, 2007; Kalafat & Elias, 1994; Kalafat & Gagliano, 1996; Hennig, Crabtree, & Baum, 1998; Klingman & Hochdorf, 1993; Nelson, 1987; Shaffer et al., 1991; Spirito, Overholser, Ashworth, Morgan, & Benedict-Drew, 1988
Participant reports of reductions in suicide vulnerability, risk behaviours, or attempts	Aseltine & DiMartino, 2004; Eggert, Thompson, Herting, & Nicholas 1995; LaFramboise & Howard-Pitney, 1995; Orbach & Bar-Joseph, 1993; Randell, Eggert, & Pike, 2001; Zenere & Lazarus, 1997, 2009

Miller et al. (2009) provide a cautionary caveat to some of the promising findings described in the latter half of the table above stating that they found methodological flaws and limitations (according to measures typical of the public health research paradigm) in the majority of the original studies published between 1987 and 2007, concluding that the results of their review “clearly reveal that there is much still unknown about effective school-based suicide prevention” (p. 183). These equivocal findings have been corroborated by other systematic reviews over the past decade with researchers concluding there was “insufficient evidence to

support curriculum-based suicide prevention programs for adolescents” (Ploeg et al., 1996 as cited in [White et al., in press, p. 10](#)) for studies published between 1980 and 1996, and that there “is insufficient evidence to either support *or* [emphasis added] not to support curriculum-based suicide prevention programs in schools” (Guo & Harstall, 2002 as cited in [White et al., in press, p. 11](#)). Recent commentary from [Berman \(2009\)](#) exemplifies how the uncertain, unpredictable, and unknown characteristics of school-based suicide prevention programming have changed little since the original well-intentioned efforts of the 1980s:

Much of what is available in the name of universal prevention programs has “feel good” qualities and allows schools to make known that they are doing something; but . . . doing something without paying attention to whether that “something” has some demonstrable connection to accomplishing desired outcomes regarding suicide and suicidal behaviors (“Does this program work?”) makes little sense. (pp. 235-236)

### **“Stress” and “Mental Illness” in Suicide Prevention Programming**

Clearly, one dominant theme in the program evaluation literature is that there is a lack of consensus on several levels about school-based suicide prevention efforts. Specifically, there is disagreement about *what* to do in the cause of school-based youth suicide prevention, *how* to effectively measure the effectiveness of such programming, and disaccord about whether it should be done at all. Another theme in the literature relates to the etiology of suicide amongst young people, specifically the shift from suicide being caused by intolerable “stress,” to suicide as being caused by an “untreated mental illness or psychiatric disorder.” [Garland, Shaffer, and Whittle \(1989\)](#), researchers situated in the medical/psychiatric research tradition, concluded that 95% of U.S. school-based suicide prevention programs for adolescents between 1984 and 1987 “subscribed to the view that suicide is most commonly a response to extreme stress or pressure

and could happen to anyone,” (p. 931) and went on to emphasize the “possible negative implications of this ‘stress model’ of suicide.” Programs utilizing the so-called “stress-model” typically contain psycho-educational materials designed to teach young people about “stressors” (e.g., school, familial, social stressors) and the process through which such stressors might manifest to such an untenable level that suicidal behaviour becomes a response. Rendering suicide as contingent upon “stress” precipitated concern for several researchers who posited that underemphasizing the link between suicide and “psychopathology” might carry potential for the oversimplification of suicide and could result in “imitative” suicidal behaviour (Shaffer, Garland, Gould, Fisher, & Trautman, 1988; Garland et al., 1989). Specifically, these researchers’ concerns have been interpreted to advise against prevention messaging that explains suicide as an “understandable response to an individual’s stressful situation” as it might cause people to conceive suicide as a “normal response to fairly common life circumstances” (Suicide Prevention Research Centre, n.d., p. 2).

It would appear these concerns aligned with a significant shift in the school-based suicide prevention literature towards describing suicide in relation to terms of “psychopathology” and “mental illness.” This shift is well exemplified by Ciffone’s (1993) dictum, “Adolescents *must* [emphasis added] understand that suicidal attempts and completions are usually symptoms of treatable psychiatric illnesses” (p. 202). Ciffone goes on to cite Clark who states:

Deaths by suicide almost always occur in the context of a psychiatric illness (often unrecognized and undiagnosed). Failure to address this fact . . . are points where the identified school-based program seem out of touch with current scientific knowledge.”

(p. 199)

The truth of “suicide as pathological and a matter of psychiatric concern” (Marsh, 2010, p. 29) has shown up in material ways across several versions of school-based youth suicide prevention programming, of which the “Signals of Suicide” (SOS) school-based prevention program is a good example (Aseltine & DeMartino, 2004). The SOS program differs from universal suicide prevention programs because it incorporates both curricula designed to raise students’ awareness about suicide *and* a brief screening tool for factors that have been identified by the epidemiological and aetiological research literatures as increasing risks for suicide.

Descriptions of the SOS program explicitly state:

Students are taught that suicide is directly related to mental illness, typically depression, and that suicide is not a normal reaction to stress or emotional upset. Youths are taught to recognize the signs of suicide and depression in themselves and in others, and they are taught the specific action steps necessary for responding to those signs. The objective is to make the action steps - ACT - as instinctual a response as the Heimlich maneuver.

(Aseltine & DeMartino, 2004, p. 446)

### **The Object of “Suicide” in the Mainstream Literature**

Clearly the “facts” of suicide are still being contested in the mainstream literature. It is particularly interesting that the contestation of these facts focuses upon two particular discursive productions of suicide, namely suicide as contingent upon “stress” or suicide as contingent upon “mental illness or psychiatric disorder.” While a full discursive analysis of the mainstream literature is beyond the scope of this review of the literature, the preceding quotation serves as a useful juncture to provide a hint of the analytic approach to be undertaken later in the study. If we take a closer look at the Aseltine and DeMartino article, the above quotation is supported by five citations identified as: “Guide to Suicide Assessment and Intervention,” “Suicide Over the

Life Cycle: Risk Factors, Assessment, and Treatment of Suicidal Patients,” “Psychosocial Risk Factors for Future Adolescent Suicide Attempts,” “Suicidal Attempts Among Older Adolescents: Prevalence and Co-occurrence with Psychiatric Disorders,” and “Suicidal Behaviour and Ideation in a Community Sample of Children: Maternal and Youth Reports.” Each of the words in these titles embodies notions of objectivity, rigour, empiricism, trustworthiness, and, of course, *authority*. A cursory examination of the authors of these titles identifies accredited researchers at prestigious institutions, situated within medical, psychiatric, or psychological research paradigms, all arguably well-positioned to be “truth-tellers” about suicide (Marsh, 2010, p. 34), in turn adding to the “discursive currency” (p. 34) of Aseltine’s and DeMartino’s claims. Borrowing ideas from Potter (1996) and Gergen (1999), Marsh argues that this kind of strategy helps provide a sense of “corroboration for claims of the truth” and helps establish that one has “allies” in claim-making (p. 35). In some ways, a “pedigree of truth” is established, built upon circulating relations of power and knowledge, eventually extending to the site of the school classroom through the subject of the community educator. In turn, further reification of the truth of “suicide as pathological and a matter of psychiatric concern” is reproduced.

### **Gaps in the Mainstream Literature**

A preliminary assessment of the mainstream literature identifies several assumptions that I intend to explore further as my study unfolds. First, the majority of studies investigating the phenomena of both youth suicide and school-based youth suicide prevention education tend to employ quantitative research methods and are predominantly situated within positivist intellectual traditions of inquiry. Of course, these ways of thinking have yielded important findings which have supported our collective efforts to help people imagine the possibilities of living, but arguably it is only one way of thinking about “suicide” and “prevention.” Second, it

appears that a particular contemporary “regime of truth” (Marsh, 2010, p. 29) is being produced and reproduced broadly across the relevant literature. This is unsurprising given the relative dominance of particular research paradigms (positivist) and discourses (medical, psychiatric) that have achieved authority to investigate and make claims about suicide. Marsh refers to this truth-making about suicide as a “compulsory ontology of pathology” resulting from the construction of links between “suicide” and “psychopathology” through particular discursive resources and practices. These links are then rendered and supported as “truth claims” through further practices related to circulating power and knowledge e.g., achieving authority in journal articles, teaching young people so that they “understand” the link between psychopathology and suicide. Third, young people tend to be positioned in distinct ways in this literature, occupying several subjectivities, for example at-risk youth, suicidal youth, youth who died by suicide, youth as receiver of knowledge, youth as measure of program efficacy. However, young people are not often asked directly about their ideas or experiences in responses to youth suicide prevention programming. White et al. (in press) have taken this notable absence up in their broader case study, engaging with young people about the ways in which they experienced and responded to a youth suicide prevention program.

### **Qualitative and Postmodern Explorations of Youth Suicide**

In an effort to respond to some of the limitations of the mainstream literature identified above, I refined my search of the literature to identify studies that (a) employ qualitative research methods; (b) trouble or loosen the “compulsory ontology of pathology” of suicide to broaden the discursive productions of suicide that are available; and (c) engage with young people about how they understand, talk about, and make meaning with the phenomenon of suicide. This process has also supported my own efforts to establish allies and solidarity in my own claim-making! I

employed the same search methods as before but added *qualitative, post structural, and discourse analysis* to the search terms. While there is a paucity of studies meeting these descriptors, I have come across several notable examples that contrast well with the mainstream literature and offer up useful perspectives to inform the direction of my research. I will now turn to providing a brief summary of some of the themes in several of these studies.

Each of the studies that were found in the second phase of the literature review included a qualitative approach to exploring the phenomenon of youth suicide. It should be noted that none of the studies specifically look at school-based youth suicide prevention education, though one study uses poststructural ideas in its examination of a violence prevention program (O'Neill & Morgan, 2001; Morgan & O'Neill, 2001). The majority of these studies were deliberate in asking young people for their opinions and ideas related to suicide. Heled and Read (2005) used a mixed methods approach (quantitative/qualitative) to ask 384 undergraduate students for their ideas about the causes of the youth suicide rate in New Zealand and for suggestions about how to reduce the rate if they were given 100 million dollars. The majority of students who completed the open-ended questions cited "pressure to conform and/or perform" as the main reason for the number of young people dying by suicide in New Zealand. This was followed by reasons specific to New Zealand (e.g., isolation, lack of opportunities) and broader concerns including financial worries, abuse/neglect, drugs/alcohol, boredom, and depression. Heled and Read observe that the "young people in this study seem to explain suicide more in terms of societal processes than in terms of individual characteristics or psychopathology," (p. 177) going on to state:

It is possible for some participants the link between depression and suicide is so obvious that it is not worth mentioning . . . it would appear however that this individualized,

pathology approach to understanding the problem [suicide] is not part of their own way of thinking about the issue. (p. 177)

Heled's and Read's (2005) observations are striking and sit in an interesting way with the contemporary "regime of truth" of suicide as pathology that has been discussed so far. While avoiding the assertion of any broad claims about these observations, it is worth wondering about how the "truth effects" of this particular regime might be implicated in formulating suicide in such a way that "for some participants the link between depression is so obvious that it is not worth mentioning" (Heled & Read, 2005, p. 177). Roen, Scourfield, and McDermott (2008) speak to this question in their explorations with young people about sense-making and suicide. While not naming it a "compulsory ontology of pathology," they argue that the dominance of medically-inspired discursive productions of suicide may "mean that few alternative understandings [of suicide] are available to young people" (p. 2090). This is echoed in work completed by Bennett, Coggan, and Adams (2003) who speak to the deep embeddedness of young people's talk about "depression" and "suicide" within the binary of a medical/moral discourse. Pursuing this line of thinking a bit further, I wonder if suicide has been *made to make sense* as the result of mental illness? What are the implications of this particular kind of sense-making for suicide prevention? Roen et al. (2008) offer the following as a possible response:

Through tracing the sense-making processes that young people negotiate, there is the opportunity to identify resistance - instances where suicide ceases to make sense - and it is these points of resistance that provide opportunities for suicide prevention. (p. 2089)

Roen and colleagues (2008) borrowed from the intellectual tradition of poststructuralism in their analysis of conversations with young people, noticing four particular discursive productions of suicide: (a) suicide and suicidal subjects as Other; (b) suicidal subjecthood as

readily accessible; (c) suicide as rational; and (d) production of suicidal subjects. It is perhaps useful to highlight some key details that have particular relevance for this study.

[Roen et al. \(2008\)](#) describe discursive practices of distancing taking place in their conversations with young people, specifically the use of religion, class, and gender to maintain distance, i.e., “suicides don’t happen here.” Roen et al. describe the effects of discursive distancing as creating “non-suicidal onlooker subjectivities” in relation to Other suicidal subjectivities, in turn preventing the possibility of onlooker existences being brought into question by the suicidal subjectivities of Others. The question of how suicidal subjecthood and Othering shows up in the context of the curriculum and interviews with young people will be explored as part of this study’s analytic strategy. Roen et al. describe suicidal possibilities are constructed as “omnipresent” (p. 2093): Suicide is formulated as possible, plausible, imaginable, and directly (sometimes intimately) read and known in the lives of the youth participants. Roen et al. suggest that discursively framing suicide as something “omnipresent,” rather than a sign of pathology or immorality gives permission for suicidal possibilities to be entertained, which in turn links in interesting ways to [Gould et al.’s \(1998\)](#) and others’ stance on the risks of oversimplifying and normalizing suicide. Roen et al.’s positing of an alternative reading of suicide as intertwined with the endeavour of find meaning in life, rather than as shocking or a sign of psychopathology, might discursively render suicide as *ordinary*, which inevitably leads to an interesting question: What forms of action might follow on from a discursive production of suicide as ordinary?

The remaining studies also present alternative discursive productions of suicide linked to phenomena alternative to psychopathology. [Fullagar \(2003\)](#) too borrows from poststructural ideas in her research and suggests that youth suicide is a “refusal to engage with, and be

sustained by, the particular economies of value, morality, and meaning that govern identity within contemporary cultural life” (p. 291). Fullagar pays particular attention to social relations of “shame” and the ways in which capitalism, economies of value, waste, and actuarial measures of risk all have productive effects upon formulations of youth suicide and prevention. The role of “shame” in the formulation of suicide was explored in depth during conversations with young people who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered in a study completed by [McDermott, Roen, and Scourfield \(2008\)](#). These authors make links between the familiar liberal humanist discourse and its emphasis upon self-regulation, amidst powerful contextually driven practices of heteronormativity and homophobia, in turn creating a binary of subjectivities (proud subject position coping with homophobia/failed-ashamed subject position distressed by homophobia). McDermott and colleagues noticed that “suicide” and the “failed-ashamed” subject position were often discursively produced together, supporting Fullagar’s assertion that the liberal humanist discourse’s construction of individualized experiences of “not-measuring up” combined with contextual phenomena like homophobia are key factors in understanding suicide.

### **Chapter Summary**

I would like to close this chapter by linking these most recent qualitative and postmodern inquiries into youth suicide to my own study. In summary, these studies have helped establish that rigorous qualitative inquiry into the phenomenon of youth suicide is possible, useful, and necessary. Second, several alternative discursive productions of suicide were described across several of these studies which have important implications for how we think about practices of youth suicide prevention. Specifically, if a singular truth of suicide as psychopathology is at the core of contemporary prevention efforts, how is it made possible to respond to young people’s

refusal to engage with living in contexts that promote subjectivities of shame resulting from practices of homophobia? This will be an important consideration throughout my study. Third, many of the studies were located in traditions of poststructuralism for the purposes of data analysis. Such an analytic approach helped bring into relief the availability of discursive resources available to the participants, lending insight to the relationships between discourses, participants' subjectivities, the resulting practices, and material conditions (contexts) within which these happenings take place (Willig, 2008). Finally, it appears that discursive productions of suicide within the particular context of a school-based youth suicide prevention curriculum, have yet to be discussed in the literature. Hence, this study has the opportunity to build upon the important critical and expansive work already completed, and offer a unique contribution to how we think about and implement youth suicide prevention education in the classroom.

## Chapter IV: Approach to Inquiry

### Stirring the Ground

My methodological decision to draw upon Foucault in this study stems from my interest in “stirring the ground” underneath contemporary practices of youth suicide prevention education, particularly those that take place in the classroom. Note that when I say, “stirring the ground” I am *not* denouncing or judging classroom-based youth suicide prevention programming. Rather, I am practicing critique from the inside, raising suspicions about the assumed naturalness of the taken-for-granted given practices that *we*, myself included, employ under the banner of preventing youth suicide. The notion of critique can be understood here in the context of suspending judgment and offering a “new practice of values based on that very suspension” (Butler, 2002, p. 2). Specifically, this study offers the opportunity to critically examine the practices underpinning the activity of youth suicide prevention programming in the classroom.

As a reminder, my overarching purpose in this study is to explore the discursive limits of suicide within the classroom context supported by the following research questions:

1. How is “suicide” most usually discursively formulated within the context of a classroom-delivered youth suicide prevention program?
2. How are the discursive formations of “suicide” produced and used throughout the program? Specifically, what do the discursive formations accomplish?
3. How might Foucault’s “technologies of dominance” and “technologies of the care of the self” be applied to understanding the effects of the discursive formations?

These questions link to my interest in how the classroom becomes a site for complex relations between power and truth. In particular, the production and circulation of particular

truths through power, and the ways truths about “suicide” are bound up with institutions and systems of knowledge upon which they depend for their dispersion. They also align with my exploration of the productive effects of particular discursive formations in making suicide nameable and recognizable in particular ways (e.g., at the level of the body). Further, these questions help to shine a light on the production of subjectivities through discourse that have the potential to constrain and/or enable action. In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive description of the analytical approach I took to respond to these questions through my development of a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analytic.

### **Developing a Foucauldian-Inspired Discourse Analytic Strategy**

Arguably, in the context of the material presented in Chapter II, Foucault’s “toolbox” has potential for responding to the wonderings that have punctuated my writing so far. This leads to an important question: How can my reading of the intellectual resources provided by Foucault support the development of a discourse analytic strategy? Further, how might my discourse analytic strategy be situated within broader ideas of discourse analysis? I have been deliberate in deciding not to embark on a full archeological or genealogical analysis for the reasons I provided earlier. These original reasons can be augmented with some additional points. On the one hand, archeological analysis appears to presume the existence of an “autonomous discourse,” a detached analytical observer, and non-agentic subjects (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). The tendency for archeological analysis to take on a structuralist flavour, especially when its application fails to take into account institutional or social practices, also needs to be considered (Prado, 2006). On the other hand, genealogical analysis focuses on the “historicity and contingent emergence of objects of knowledge and systems of practices,” (Yates & Hiles, 2010, p. 62) and affords greater primacy to the role of power relations. As I have noted, I am

particularly interested in how power-knowledge, and truth circulate through the practices of a classroom-based youth suicide prevention program, which is de-emphasized in archeological approaches to analysis. The material effects of discursive formations are also of concern.

However, a full genealogical analysis of the historicity of youth suicide prevention practices is beyond the scope of this current study, particularly considering the type of data available for analysis. [Marsh \(2010\)](#) has already made a notable contribution in this area, having completed a comprehensive analysis of the historicity and contingency of “suicide” as an object.

However, Foucault’s archeological and genealogical work have undoubtedly inspired the analytical topography of my study and show up in my attempts to be inventive with Foucault’s “toolbox.” In this next section, I present the ways I have brought Foucauldian ideas to bear in the context of my inquiry. I have infused several of Foucault’s ideas throughout my development of a discourse analytic designed to respond to the research questions restated above. Specifically, I am reliant upon Foucault’s explanations of discourse, power-knowledge, truth, objectification, and subjectification. To further support my infusion of Foucauldian ideas into my discourse analytic method, I have borrowed upon existing applications of Foucauldian discourse analysis to educational contexts (e.g., [Baxter, 2008](#); [Kendall & Wickham, 1999](#)), individuals’ talk (e.g., [Willig, 2008](#); [Yates & Hiles, 2010](#)), and genealogical analysis (e.g., [Marsh, 2010](#)). I have selected these particular examples of analysis to inform my strategy because they (a) most closely align with the interpretations of Foucault discussed in Chapter II; (b) mirror the context/site of my study (i.e., a school classroom); (c) apply their analysis to “talk” rather than other kinds of data e.g., policy documents; and (d) consider the interplay of power-knowledge, truth, and discourse respectively. These resources have helped me to develop a series of *prompts* that supported my analytical process. Specifically, the prompts outlined below helped to ensure

my analysis aligned closely with my overall research objective and questions. To be clear, the scope of my study precluded me from pursuing each of the prompts individually as discrete research questions. Rather, as prompts, they acted as way-finders during my analysis of the data.

### **Analytical Prompts**

*Research Question #1: How is “suicide” most usually discursively formulated within the context of a classroom-delivered youth suicide prevention program?*

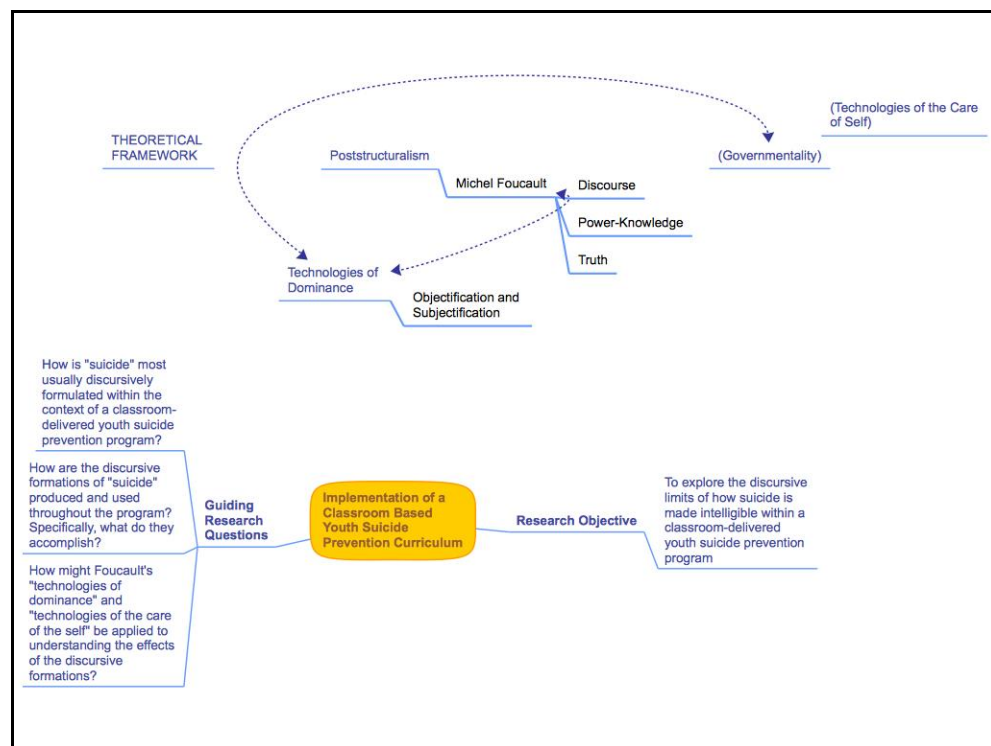
- i. What regular and systematic groups of statements are produced in relation to the object of “suicide”? (Kendall & Wickham)
- ii. How do the groups of statements relate to each other?
- iii. What type of object is being produced through the groupings of statements? (Willig)
- iv. Which discursive formations are positioned as having more authority than others in regard to “suicide”? (Marsh)

*Research Question #2: How are the discursive formations of “suicide” produced and used throughout the program? Specifically, what do the discursive formations accomplish?*

- i. What elements are used to produce the discursive formations? (e.g., stories, images, metaphors, statistics) (Marsh)
- ii. What particular discourses are being called upon in the formation of discursive formations? (Willig)
- iii. What relationships exist between discursive formations and institutions/social practices? (Marsh)
- iv. Who is legitimized to speak with authority about the object of “suicide”? (Marsh)
- v. What other means are employed to disperse and promulgate accounts of “suicide” in this context?

*Research Question #3: How might Foucault's "technologies of dominance" and "technologies of the care of the self" be applied to understanding the effects of the discursive formations?*

- i. What is most sayable/visible about the object of "suicide"?
- ii. How do processes of objectification (scientific classification/dividing practices) show up?
- iii. What subject positions are made unavailable/available by the circulating accounts? How is action constrained/enabled from the subject positions? (Marsh; Willig)
- iv. In what ways do particular discursive formations relate, or not relate, to practices of bio-power?
- v. In what ways do particular discursive formations relate, or not relate, to confessional practices?



**Figure 2. Overview of analytic strategy.** A visual representation of (a) the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis linked to Foucault and (b) the analytical questions scaffolding the analysis.

Figure 2 is an aerial view of my theoretical framework and provides a visual placeholder for the basic theoretical assumptions informing my analysis (e.g., discourse, power-knowledge), my overall research objective, and the corresponding research questions. I have tried to avoid being ensnared in the trap of presenting a manualized and step-by-step series of instructions for an analytical approach that arguably resists a closed and prescriptive methodology. This illustration shows how my objective and research questions are anchored by broader theoretical ideas, which are in turn supported by the analytical prompts I listed above. My analytic is contingent upon a series of theoretical assumptions about discourse that were first presented in Chapter II and posit that: (a) Discourse operates through discursive formations comprised of groupings of statements carrying some constancy (which are historically and contextually contingent); (b) discourse goes beyond the limits of language and essential meaning; (c) discursive formations are productive in that they can constrain and enable action and make un/available arrays of subject positions; and (d) it is impossible to stand outside (and inside) of discourse.

While I paid some attention to the epistemological and ontological premises of Foucault's work in the chapter outlining my theoretical framework, I think it is important to spend some time explicating how they relate directly to my inquiry. Several key points can be made based on ideas presented by [Taylor \(2001\)](#). First, I am not seeking to capture a singularized "Truth" about the reality of youth suicide prevention programming in the particular classrooms featured in this study. Rather, I anticipate my analytic strategy will produce a limited interpretation of the practices documented. The interpretations produced through my analysis are necessarily reflective of my own positioning as someone with a vested interest in youth suicide prevention both as a practitioner and researcher. Second, the analytic strategy presented here assumes the

presence of multiple, contingent, and constitutive truths in the social world. The discursive formations I am seeking to map distort, change, and influence the very phenomena they seek to name. It can be argued that knowledges are produced and not discovered (White, personal communication, June 30, 2010) and those that are produced by this study are partial, situated, and relative. The purpose of this study is not to make claims about generalizability or universal applicability, but within the context of analysis (a school classroom) claims might be made about the significance and persistence of particular discursive formations and how they relate to broader discourses that reference “suicide.”

### **Broader Conceptualizations of Discourse Analysis**

Arguably, the discourse analytic I have described in this chapter is most closely aligned with what others have named as “Foucauldian discourse analysis” (FDA) (Willig, 2008) and strands of “critical discourse analysis” (CDA) (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). I have resisted identifying my analytic approach as a full-blown “Foucauldian discourse analysis,” partly because my approach does not incorporate all the analytical dimensions as espoused by other Foucauldian discourse analysts (e.g., genealogy), and partly because I think Foucault would have eschewed having a research methodology named after him. Both FDA and CDA can be situated within a much broader continuum of discourse analysis research methods. I have already commented that discourse can be slippery. Arguably, that same quality of slipperiness and ambiguity can be extended to the diversity of approaches to discourse analysis. Potter (2004) explains that discourse analysis is understood and practiced in diverse ways across qualitative research, which he links to the heterogeneity of disciplinary locations where discourse analysis has been developed. Discourse analysis as a broad term encompasses an array of analyses including sociolinguistic, critical, narrative, conversation, and so on. Comprehensive overviews

of the epistemological, ontological, and methodological assumptions of the array of discourse analytic methods can be found in [Jaworski and Coupland \(1999\)](#), [van Dijk \(1996\)](#), and [Taylor \(2001\)](#).

While Foucauldian discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis have similarities with broader conceptualizations of discourse analysis - e.g., discourse analysis in social psychology ([Potter & Wetherell, 1987](#)) - there are subtle and significant distinctions that are worth mentioning. The primary goal of discourse analysis is often framed as the analysis of *how* individuals use discursive resources to meet interpersonal ends in the context of social interactions. Alternatively, FDA and CDA seek to analyze the mutually constitutive relationship between discourse, subjects, and objects. The goal of analysis here is to explore what objects and subjects are produced through discourse and the ways in which action is both constrained and enabled ([Willig, 2008](#)). Both approaches also carry different assumptions about agency. Discourse analysis presumes that individuals have agency in their selection of which discursive repertoires to call upon during interactions. FDA and CDA position agency more at the level of discourses themselves in their production of objects and subjects ([Wooffitt, 2005](#)), though this is not universally seen across all of their applications. Accounts of the production of the subject afforded by feminist poststructuralism suggest that an “individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which he or she participates” ([Davies, 2000](#), p. 89). Wooffitt goes on to suggest that discourse analysis can be framed as a “bottom-up” analytic approach linked to its examination of the arrangement of language practices. This is compared with the “top-down” focus upon broader social, political, cultural, and historical contexts within FDA and CDA. At a finer grained level, FDA and CDA have overlap as well.

Wooffitt (2005) argues that both research approaches engage with broader political dimensions with the intent of rendering visible structural inequalities in power. In keeping with the theoretical ideas put forward by Foucault, FDA has an agenda of troubling regulatory manifestations of power-knowledge and their subsequent material effects on people. Finally, a major difference between FDA and CDA can be seen in their treatment of cognition. Wooffitt explains that FDA is critical of the assumption that discourses are just an extension of human cognition, whereas CDA tends to maintain the relationship between discourse and cognitive processes.

What I have presented here is a limited account of the various permutations of discourse analysis and their overlapping and distinctive characteristics. While I have provided some contrast between discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and Foucauldian discourse analysis, it should be noted that there is considerable methodological tension and dispute across the various approaches to discourse analysis. The discourse analytic I have presented here carries with it analytical blind spots that have been taken up in the discourse analysis literature. I plan to discuss some of the limitations inherent to my analytical approach, and some of the steps I have taken to address these limitations, during a later section of this chapter and in Chapter VI. I use this next section to describe the context of the study and the approaches used to document and analyze the practices of a classroom-delivered youth suicide prevention curriculum.

### **Context of Study**

This inquiry is part of a larger case study titled *Collaborating for Suicide Prevention in the Schools* which was designed to explore how school community members experienced and responded to a newly developed school-based suicide prevention curriculum and to produce feedback for the program developers. The larger study, led by Dr. Jennifer White, is ongoing.

The study started after receiving full ethical approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board. Further, ethical approval has been granted for data gathered during the study to be used in analysis for the purposes of thesis completion. For fuller information about the methodological aspects of the larger study, see [White, Morris, and Hinbest \(in press\)](#). The youth suicide prevention curriculum was implemented in Middleton Secondary School<sup>2</sup> (Grades 8 to 12) in Vancouver, British Columbia. The community organization delivering the program selected the school as a site to implement its newly developed youth suicide prevention program. The school has a medium-sized, ethnically diverse student population of approximately 1,000 and is located in a relatively affluent community. The program delivery took place between November 2008 and May 2009 and was comprised of four 90-minute inter-linked modules delivered to two Grade 11 English classes during regularly scheduled class time. Five different community educators (including paid staff and volunteers) co-facilitated the modules in classrooms of 20 to 25 students.

The first two modules focused on coping and stress management while the latter two contained material related to recognizing a peer in suicidal distress, the steps to take in responding to that peer, and seeking help. The psycho-educational features of the curriculum included facilitator-led lectures on the program material, small-group activities and discussions, and the screening of a 20-minute DVD. The DVD contained narratives from individuals affected by suicide and a demonstration of peer support and intervention.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Various data were collected during the larger case study including field notes and videotape of the program implementation across both classrooms, interviews with the community educators, school personnel, and students, reflective logs provided by some of the

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<sup>2</sup> The name of the school has been changed.

community educators, audio tape of collaborative inquiry team meetings, and written student feedback that was collected after each module. The texts of analysis for the purposes of this study are transcripts of “naturally occurring talk” (Potter, 2004, p. 200) produced from the audio and video tapes of the *final* two modules in both classrooms. To be clear, modules three and four focused on recognition and response to a friend “at risk of suicide.” Potter (2004) defines naturally occurring talk as “spoken language produced entirely independently of the actions of the researcher . . . it is natural in the specific sense that it is not ‘got up’ by the researcher using an interview schedule, a questionnaire, an experimental protocol or some such social research technology” (pp. 148-149). Potter suggests that his definition does not treat naturally occurring talk as a “straightforward discovered object” (p. 149), but rather as a theoretical and analytical vantage point to view spoken interactions.

Data were collected by direct observation. We were present for each of the four modules across both Grade 11 English classes. An audio recorder was placed at the front of the classroom to pick up the voices of the community educators. We sat at the back of the classroom where we were able to control the video recorder while taking field notes. Our research ethics approval allowed us to focus the video recorder solely on the community educators. We were able to document all the community educators’ dialogue and movements and some of the students’ dialogue. The audio and video recorders picked up the majority of the students’ dialogue during large group discussions. The layout of the classroom and background noise disrupted our efforts to document student interactions during small group activities. It should also be noted that a school counsellor was present for each module’s implementation. The class teacher was present on some occasions. When they were absent, a substitute teacher attended in their place.

### **Research Ethics**

Although this thesis is concerned primarily with the analysis of data gathered in the context of a larger study, it is still necessary to clarify the methods that were followed pursuant to the approval received from the University of Victoria’s Human Research Ethics Board. These procedures are outlined in Table 2 below:

**Table 2. Research Methods and Ethical Protocols**

Data Set	Description
<i>Full Case Study (Videotaping and observation of classroom delivery, interviews with students)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parent permission requested for videotaping and observation of classroom delivery</li> <li>2. Parent permission requested for young person to complete anonymous questionnaire</li> <li>3. Parent permission requested for young person to complete anonymous questionnaire <i>and</i> participate in two individual interviews</li> <li>4. Students provided information and consent requested to participate according to the options presented above</li> </ol>

It is also important to consider ethical considerations related to the writing up and presenting of data gathered during the case study. Community partners voluntarily exposed their curriculum and the ways in which they practice youth suicide prevention. Care has been taken to write up the findings from this study in a way that not only preserves their anonymity and confidentiality, but also reflects the research team’s commitments to transparency, accountability, and collaborative inquiry. The theoretical implications of Foucauldian notions of subjectification are also important to consider in terms of “writing up” the analysis. As I stated in my description of the analytic strategy, one of the main assumptions of this study is that discourse both constrains and enables action. Hence, the subject positions available for the

community educators, the students, and myself as a researcher in the context of this study are all constituted by the interplay between power-knowledge, truth, and discourse. My efforts to problematize and critique are not directed at the community educators who are members of our long-standing collaborative inquiry team. Rather the critique generated through this process of analysis is directed at the games of truth that position us all.

### **Approach to Data Analysis**

The audio recordings of modules three and four across both Grade 11 English classrooms provided six hours of recorded interactions. These recordings were then transcribed and uploaded to qualitative data analysis software (MaxQDA) for the purposes of housing and organizing the data in a manageable way. The analytic strategy illustrated and described earlier in this chapter provided the starting place for a thorough and deep engagement with the transcripts. I selected these specific texts for analysis because they align with my research questions and overarching analytic strategy. As the school classroom was the main context for the delivery of this youth suicide prevention program, the texts documenting the spoken interactions between the community educators and students provide a rich territory within which to explore discursive formations of “suicide.” The spoken interactions between the community educators and the students is discursive work in its own right, imbued by power-knowledge relations, regimes of truth, and processes of subjectification and objectification.

In the next few pages, I chart my analytical travels through the textual data of the final two modules of the curriculum. As I have suggested previously, Foucauldian-inspired approaches to discourse typically forgo formalized and prescriptive procedures. Moreover, there is a general reluctance in the literature to manualize discourse analysis, which is often explained in terms of the difficulty of “translating a skill into a technique” ([Hepburn, 1997](#)). Indeed, many

research methods texts coin the words of [Wetherell and Potter \(1992\)](#) who describe discourse analysis as a “craft skill, something like bicycle riding or chicken sexing that is not easy to render or describe in an explicit or codified manner,” (p. 101) that relies predominantly on “tacit expertise” ([Wooffitt, 2005, p. 43](#)).

In an effort to avoid striating my analytical account with procedural steps, I use the metaphor of visiting the optometrist. The intellectual resources outlined in Chapter II, the *Theoretical Framework* chapter, can be likened to the lenses used by the optometrist to check eyesight - with the important caveat that the purpose of my analysis is *not* to arrive at a prescription. Rather, I used the lenses as offered by the questions in the analytical strategy every time I completed a close read of the transcripts. Sometimes I would read through the transcript with just one lens, whilst at other times I would use several in an attempt to explore the interplay and synergy between each of the analytical nodes. Extending the metaphor, the lenses at times proved to be both clarifying and blurring when reading across the layers of the data corpus. I will now turn to a description of the analytical focus made available by each of the following analytical lenses.

One of the first analytical forays I took was to watch and listen to the recordings of the interactions between the community educators and students during each workshop implementation. I did this without the written transcripts. My rationale here was to loosen my binds with the “textual authority of the printed text” and the “knowledge that only the text can provide” ([Mazzei, 2007, p. 638](#)). My intention was to immerse myself in a fuller and thicker enactment of the dialogues taking place in the classroom and, in turn, I was able to attune to more of the interactional interstices between the community educators themselves and the students. I was also better able to discern the productive effects of the discursive work being

undertaken in the classroom which are rendered quite differently in written form. For example, the production of silence in response to particular authoritative accounts about “suicide” threaded itself throughout the workshops. I repeatedly went back to the video and audio recordings during my exploration of the transcripts to augment the analytical process of connecting and disconnecting, smoothing and rupturing. However, it should be noted at this point that most of the analytical process used in this study was reliant upon the transcripts. Future analytical work can and should place greater emphasis upon more of what Mazzei calls the “subordinated elements of performance” (p. 639) in these data.

**Discursive formations.** The analytical lens of “discursive formations” aligns with the first research question: How is “suicide” most usually discursively formulated within the context of a classroom-delivered youth suicide prevention program? Reading the transcripts through this analytical lens involved identifying both explicit and implicit references to the object of “suicide,” with the proviso that “suicide” is not being assumed to be a *constant* object throughout the texts. As Willig (2008) suggests, I was deliberate in my analysis to *not* focus solely on “lexical comparability,” (p. 115) so I also turned my gaze to seemingly dissimilar statements that carried regularity in their reference to “suicide.” I was specifically interested in how groups of statements did not directly invoke “suicide” but were still referencing it as an object all the same. The rather complex analytical task here was to not necessarily look for coherence and continuity between textual references to “suicide.” It was to explore *formations* of references to “suicide” interconnected by simultaneously continuous *and* discontinuous relationships. These relationships were also helpful in noticing how certain discursive formations were granted higher authority or “truth-status” than others.

**Discursive production and dispersion.** This frame of analysis is inspired by the second research question: How are the discursive formations of “suicide” produced and used throughout the program? Specifically, what do the discursive formations accomplish? While reading the transcripts with this question in mind, I paid attention to the means through which discursive formations referring to suicide were produced and promulgated. This included a noticing of the role of devices within discursive formations, including stories, images, metaphors, and statistics (Marsh, 2010). It also included attempts to contextualize the identified formations within broader discourses, while responding to critique from Widdicombe (1995) and Wooffitt (2005) about the tendency for examples of Foucauldian- and critically-inspired analyses to fall into the trap of the “analytic rush” (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 182). This is defined as the inclination for analysts to make overreaching claims about the imprints of broader discourses in text *without* “clear explication of how the data supports those claims” (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 182). I tried to respond to these concerns in my own analysis by (a) referring directly to the interrelated statements in the text which might be linked to broader discourses and (b) linking the identified statement groups to broader repositories of discourse (e.g., journal articles situated within a psychiatric discourse). Within this dimension of analysis, I was also concerned with exploring the relationship between locally accomplished discursive productions and broader social institutions and practices. I also brought analytical attention to practices which might suggest that particular institutions or individuals are more legitimized than others to utter statements about “suicide.”

**Technologies.** This additional layer of analysis is guided by the third research question: How might Foucault’s “technologies of dominance” and “technologies of the care of the self” be applied to understanding the effects of the discursive formations? At several levels, I was interested in the “action orientation” (Willig, 2008, p. 116) of the discursive formations

throughout the text. I documented what particular formations accomplished at particular times, especially when placed in relation to other formations. This kind of analysis required consideration of two kinds of context: the textual surroundings and the context within which the utterances were being made (e.g., a school classroom). In other words, I found it important to not analyze excerpts in isolation. This lens of analysis also helped me focus upon describing processes of objectification and subjectification, and explore occurrences of classification, division, and the production of subject positions. This also allowed exploration of how suicide is made knowable and recognizable, especially at the level of the body. I identify this in my findings as *corporeal inscriptions*. In keeping with the question of “action” and productivity, my analysis focused upon the kinds of subject positions made available and how action was constrained and enabled from those subject positions. This also helped respond to the question of what was most visible and sayable about “suicide” from these subjectivities. Certain ways of being and practicing became legitimized and possible from the vantage point of different subject positions or subjectivities which are reciprocally constitutive upon social practices and institutions (Willig, 2008). While future analytical work will engage more deeply with notions of governmentality/bio-power and care of the self, this analytical frame was used as a starting place to explore how acts of youth suicide prevention might be understood as technologies of care of the self e.g., confessional practices.

### **Reflexivity**

So far in this chapter I have provided (a) an overview of the development of my Foucauldian-inspired discourse analytic, (b) the questions that guided my inquiry, and (c) an overview of how I proceeded with the analytical process. Overall, I would argue that the methodological underpinnings of this study are “critically” inspired, in that I am engaging with

the current social order as it relates to practices of youth suicide prevention. However, my use of the word “critical” does need to be contextualized and defended. [Fairclough \(1992\)](#), one of the original proponents of critical discourse analysis (note that the discourse analytic I have described aligns with, but is not the same thing as, critical discourse analysis) argues that critical approaches “differ from non-critical approaches in not just describing discursive practices, but also showing how discourse is shaped by relations of power” (p. 12). The main thrust behind my analysis is an exploration of the connections behind language and power, contextualizing the discursive elements of a classroom-based youth suicide prevention program within a wider socio-political context. Arguably, my research is political. However, I have deliberately tried to avoid adopting a polemic stance or advancing my own political agenda for youth suicide prevention programming. I agree with [Potter’s \(1996\)](#) assertion that critique should be contingent upon what is generated from the process of analysis, rather than walking into the analysis with a pre-specified political outcomes.

In keeping with my argument that this piece of research is practicing critique, I also need to extend that same critique to the discourses that inform this whole inquiry. [Billig \(2003\)](#) cites Gunther Kress who wrote, “all signs are . . . equally subject to critical reading . . . [for] no sign is innocent” (p. 36). Billig goes on to suggest in his own words, “we cannot use critical terminology un-reflexively, as if our own words are somehow magically innocent. If we do, then we run the risk of ignoring the political economy in which we operate” (p. 36). This has inspired my commitments to hold my analytic strategy with some tentativeness, aware that it too stands on contestable theoretical ground and can be critiqued from the inside and outside. It is also subject to the inherent circularity of discourse analysis in that the same strategies of analysis described in this chapter could be applied to this thesis itself. My awareness of the political

economy in which I operate has helped me notice my own complicity and participation in the very same social order that produces and reproduces the discursive practices I go on to critique. I too am well trained up in those discursive practices. I am also aware that the statements I have uttered in this document are part of a broader socio-political context of fulfilling the requirements of a master's degree in a post-secondary institution. From this important juncture of analytical reflexivity, I now turn to a discussion of how I have tried to reinterpret notions of "rigour" in the context of my study.

### **Reconceptualizing "Rigour"**

How can the idea of "rigour" be applied to a study inspired by epistemological assumptions that trouble the idea of a single, objective, and verifiable truth? How do the discursive productions of "reliability" and "validity" reconcile with a research methodology that is seeking to render visible and critique particular truth regimes? In short, these notions are insufficient for a post-structuralist discourse analytic methodology. However, the insufficiency of these terms, sourced from positivist traditions of inquiry, does not grant me license to practice "methodological anarchy" throughout my research. [White and Morris \(2010\)](#), drawing from [Taylor \(2001\)](#), propose three criteria for evaluating the merits of a study situated in similar epistemological waters: fruitfulness, coherence, and practical application. I would like to add to these three ideas by turning to the work of [Nixon and Power \(2007\)](#) who explicate an additional language of rigour. They position a criteria of "meaning" alongside existing criteria of "truth" and "reliability" arriving at six criteria against which this study can be evaluated.

**Table 3. Reconceptualizing rigour** (From Nixon & Power, 2007, p. 76)

## Description

- 
- 1) *Clear research questions appropriate for discourse analysis*
  - 2) *Clear definition of discourse and theoretical assumptions of selected discourse analytic*
  - 3) *Effective use of theoretical framework - clarity and explicitness in epistemological and ontological positioning*
  - 4) *Transparency in analysis methods and application of theory to analysis*
  - 5) *Clarity in selection of talk and texts*
  - 6) *Concepts, criteria, and strategies to guide analysis*

The research questions identified earlier align well with a discourse analytic approach especially in their orientation toward examining the discursive formations at work during the classroom presentations. The assumptions of discourse have been stated several times throughout this thesis, integrated within an overall poststructural theoretical framework inspired by the intellectual work of Foucault. Concepts including discursive formation, discourse, power-knowledge, truth, objectification, and subjectification have been explicated in some detail. Exemplars and associated analysis are portrayed in the next chapter in an effort to make visible the analytical process, and the selected “texts” are a fruitful site for exploratory work. I have also continued the explication of my “theoretical decision trail” (Cheek, 2004) to avoid any risk of opacity in my research process. Finally, there is one additional criterion that I would like to add to Table 3: “stir-ability.” My intent in this research has been to stir the ground under the contemporary truth regimes of classroom youth-based suicide prevention programming by rendering visible some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of the practice. My hope is that this piece of research, in conjunction with the larger case study led by Dr. Jennifer White, can be evaluated as ground-stirring, perhaps fissuring, in our joint aims of thinking about youth suicide prevention in new ways.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter helps to bridge between my theoretical framework and my portrayal of the findings and discussion in the next chapter. During the course of this chapter I made space to provide a full illustration of the Foucauldian-inspired discourse analytic infusing this study, followed by an account of my interpretative engagements with the transcripts documenting the classroom-implemented youth suicide prevention program. I also included ethical considerations in this discussion, emphasizing that the critique generated through this research is directed at the interplay between power-knowledge, discourse, and truth in their reference to the object of “suicide.” Finally, I drew attention to my commitments to critical reflexivity and reconceptualized notions of rigour throughout this inquiry.

## **Chapter V: Exploring the Discursive Limits of “Suicide” in the Classroom**

In this chapter, I would like to present a series of excerpts from the transcripts of the naturally-occurring classroom talk taking place during the implementation of a youth suicide prevention program. The talk was both videotaped and audiotaped within two classrooms at Middletown Secondary School in Vancouver, British Columbia. Two community educators were present to facilitate each module of the program to classes consisting of between 20 and 25 Grade 11 students.

My interpretations of how the discursive practices documented here make “suicide” intelligible are presented in this chapter. I document and make transparent my analysis, in an attempt to examine how discursive practices help to constitute “suicide” as an object. These excerpts were selected as exemplars from the latter two modules of the curriculum which focused specifically on suicide. The key findings are presented below under the following headings: (a) suicide as private, internal, and individualized; (b) the “Truth” about suicide - exploring power, knowledge, and discourse; (c) suicidal bodies - corporeal inscriptions of risk; (d) preserving non-suicidal subjecthood; and (e) confessing suicide. I present an additional discussion of these interpretations and implications for practice in the following chapter.

### **Suicide as Private, Internal, and Individualized**

An array of statements function within the naturally-occurring talk of the classroom with constitutive and material effects in the formation of the object “suicide.” The first excerpt provided below offers a helpful starting place to explore how suicide is made “manifest, nameable, and describable” (Foucault, 1972, p. 46) within the context of this particular curriculum. This dialogue took place toward the beginning of the third of four modules of the curriculum. This module saw the introduction of the topic of suicide in conjunction with material

related to the identification of peers in distress. At this point of the workshop, the community educators were using an overhead transparency showing an array of animated faces, each displaying a different emotion.

### **Excerpt 1**

1           *Community Educator*<sup>3</sup>: Any faces up here do you think would be the faces of people who  
2           are feeling suicide?

3           *Student #1*: This one. It is kind of sad.

4           *Student #2*: This one. Crying.

5           *Student #3*: I'd say the sick guy. And the red guy.

6           *Student #4*: The bully.

7           *Student #5*: I think the really happy one. I know people who [inaudible], or they try and  
8           show that they are happy.

9           *Community Educator*: That can totally happen. We are actually going to see that in the  
10          video.

11          *Student #6*: All of them.

12          *Community Educator*: The point is that all of these faces could be faces of people that are  
13          potentially suicidal. I say that because who here has ever hidden away they truly feel,  
14          because maybe they don't want to talk about it, or they don't want to tell their friend that  
15          they are angry so they pretend everything is fine. Has anybody done that? For sure. Most  
16          of us have had that happen. It is a really common thing to hide away what you are  
17          actually feeling, and the same thing happens with somebody who is feeling suicidal. Just  
18          because somebody is portraying something on the outside, that they are really happy, it  
19          doesn't mean that that is necessarily what they are feeling.

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<sup>3</sup> All names have been changed to protect confidentiality

Interestingly, suicide is produced as different objects throughout this excerpt. On the one hand, suicide is rendered as an object that can be *felt* (lines 1-2, 13, and 17). On the other hand, suicide is rendered as a *state* (lines 12-13). This subtle distinction helps to emphasize the contingency of suicide as a knowable object, disrupting notions of suicide being a fixed and essential phenomenon. Despite the malleability of suicide as object, the thread of suicide's interiority weaves throughout the excerpt, largely predicated on the construction of a sharp distinction between an outside portrayal of behaviour and an inside feeling or state contained within the familiar bounded and unitary humanist subject. Suicide is being produced as an object that is private, internal, and individualized. Suicide as an internal feeling is something that can be hidden or obscured from the gaze of others on the outside (lines 16-18) and it can be inferred that external performances should be treated as suspect (lines 17-19). In other words, the truth of what is presented on the outside is subjugated to the truth of what is being experienced on the inside. Also of note is how suicide is cast as ubiquitous where *all* of us carry the potential for suicide regardless of how our external presentation is read by others (line 12-13).

This contemporary use of animated “emoticon” images is reminiscent of the photographs and illustrations contained in historic psychiatric texts that attempted to use portraits of patients and their countenance to visually classify and document discrete psychiatric states e.g., “suicidal melancholy” (Marsh, 2010). A key difference in the context of this excerpt of classroom talk is the idea that exterior performance may not align with the presence of interior suicide. It is worth noting that in contrast to some of the productions of suicide articulated by the community educator, some of the students' responses produce suicide through more explicit discursive dividing practices. Several of the faces on the overhead transparency are marked as different or aberrant (e.g., sick, crying, bully) and identified as “faces of people feeling suicide.” These

statements help to “enable [suicide] to appear . . . to be placed in the field of exteriority” (Foucault, 1972, p. 50). I plan to explore the idea of corporeal inscriptions of suicide in more detail during this chapter.

Before continuing my analysis of formations of suicide as private, internal, and individualized, I would like to focus some analysis upon the dichotomy between external/internal truths. The unobservable or hidden nature of suicide appears to make it amenable to *discovery* or *extraction* as shown in the excerpt below.

### Excerpt 2

1           *Community Educator:* Yes, so maybe show them that you are there for support if they do  
 2           need something. Again probably give reason to why you are asking in the first place. A  
 3           lot of times, people if they shut you out that might mean that something is true, right. If  
 4           you do that feeling where something is not right with your friends, you know your friends  
 5           really well, if something is not right, be persistent. Follow up with them. Make sure that  
 6           they are okay. We saw that a lot in the film. Sara was quite persistent with Jason trying to  
 7           get it out of him. In all likelihood in real life, this may take a long time. It is not going to  
 8           take 5 minutes like in the video. You might have to be persistent to get something out of  
 9           a friend of yours.

This particular statement was made during the final module which focused upon what action a concerned friend might take in response to a peer identified to be at risk of suicide. The third line of the excerpt offers up a very interesting assertion of how the act of hiding or keeping suicide more private *increases* its own truth-status in some way. The observer is discursively positioned as a knower of that truth and that persistence is instrumental in having that truth revealed. In other words, importance is granted to the use of persistence to uncover the

unobservable interiority of suicide. Suicide has also been formed as having a quality of intractability. Referred to as “it” and something to “get out of [someone],” (lines 6-9) the suicidal subject is positioned as someone holding on to and hiding a truth. Suicide is made intelligible as something that almost needs to be *interrogated* out of somebody, akin to a confession.

Returning to the starting place of my analysis, the production of suicide as private, internal, and individualized is further accomplished in the following excerpt which languages the relationship between suicide and what is named as “mental illness.”

### **Excerpt 3**

1           *Community Educator:* I wanted to add one more thing too, because we didn’t spend a lot  
 2           of time talking about mental illness, but what we also know from research is that a lot of  
 3           people who end up attempting and completing suicide have an undiagnosed mental  
 4           illness. Something like a depression that is not being treated or an anxiety disorder where  
 5           they have such an intense state of worry that they are consistently living in. Or bipolar  
 6           which some people call manic depression, where a person could be at a stage of real  
 7           mania, a real high, they could do anything. Maybe they are not sleeping at night because  
 8           they are go, go, go with activities. Then they crash. Then they are in that low depressed  
 9           state. All those three, and other mental illnesses are absolutely treatable. Oftentimes it is a  
 10          combination of therapy and drugs, which is what a lot of therapists or psychologists  
 11          would recommend. We know that if those experiences aren’t being treated or supported,  
 12          it does put someone at higher risk.

Lines 1-4 of the above excerpt help to illustrate how the suicidal subject is constituted in relation to a particular repository of objective knowledge, identified as “research,” that has a particular position in the “interplay of rules that make possible the appearance of objects

[suicide] during a given period of time” (Foucault, 1972, p. 36). The objective knowledge of “research,” which can be understood in terms of empirical studies situated within the intellectual tradition of medicine/psychiatry, creates particular truth-effects or a “game of truth” underpinned by processes of objectification and subjectification (Marsh, 2010). One of the truth-effects associated with the objective knowledge of “research” in this excerpt, is that suicide is made to appear as medicalized and is subsequently formulated in terms of classifications of “psychopathology” including “depression,” “anxiety,” and “bipolar.” Psychiatric power is constituted by the close linking of suicide with “untreated” depression, anxiety, and bipolar and that such underlying conditions require diagnosis and treatment by sanctioned individuals identified as “therapists” and “psychologists.” This can also be identified as what Foucault named as a “surface of emergence” where particular authorities have the capacity to designate, specify, divide, and classify the suicidal subject. Suicide is conceptualized as the result of an internalized impulse where an untreated or undiagnosed experience of “mental illness” might lead to an individual being capable of “anything” including the taking of their own life (lines 5-7). The suicidal subject is arguably positioned as passive and without agency in response to the internal forces of “mania” while therapists and psychologists are in a subject position where they are able to intervene through the use of psy-interventions such as therapy and drugs. Marsh (2010) argues in his own research that the relations of knowledge-to-power- and power-to-knowledge explained here are “productive in maintaining suicide as pathological and medical in nature” (p. 53) leading to what he identifies as a “compulsory ontology of pathology.” This excerpt exemplifies how suicide is made intelligible in terms of *being* pathology and how suicide *as* pathology is granted discursive currency through reference to the objective repository of scientific medicalized knowledge.

## The “Truth” About Suicide: Exploring Power, Knowledge, and Discourse

Continuing my analysis of suicide’s indexing with pathology, I will now turn to a more focused analysis upon the production and dispersion of particular truth claims about suicide within the classroom. I include Excerpt 4 as a starting place for this next section of analysis:

### Excerpt 4

1           *Community Educator:* That puts you in a really important position because if they are  
2           giving out warning signs about feeling really depressed or possibly thinking about taking  
3           their own life, it puts you in a really important position because you can intervene.  
4           Hopefully today we are going to teach you guys what warning signs look like, maybe  
5           some are ones that you can start picking up in friends, and then were are going to learn  
6           what to do in our next workshop.

This segment of classroom talk took place in the third module of the curriculum, shortly after the students were shown the animated faces on the overhead projector. The utterance about “giving out warning signs” (line 2) was made at repeated intervals throughout the youth suicide prevention curriculum and the “warning signs” are formulated as being amenable to detection. A discernible knowledge/power relation is woven into this excerpt by the repeated statement that the young people in the classroom will be positioned differently after receiving specialized knowledge about *how* to recognize and interpret particular warning signs. This knowledge is rendered as necessary for both the recognition and interpretation of the warning signs “given off” by the depressed or suicidal subject. Excerpt 4 highlights another set of discursive and material dividing practices through the teaching of recognizable external “clues” that make the suicidal subject knowable and recognizable. Claims to truth about recognizing and knowing the suicidal

subject were made at repeated points throughout the curriculum. Excerpt 5 is an exemplar of how certain claims about suicide in this particular program are constructed and rendered as truth.

### **Excerpt 5**

1           *Community Educator:* What we know from research is that about 70% to 80%, that is  
2           most of the time, 70% to 80%, people who are thinking about it, seriously contemplating  
3           suicide will give out warning signs that you can identify. Today we are going to talk  
4           about them, through activities. Keep those in mind and know that you are definitely, we  
5           are all in a position in our lives, in our communities where we can really make a  
6           difference and potentially save lives, if we want to and if we are conscious about what  
7           people are doing and how they might be changing.

8           *Community Educator:* What we also know from research, what do you think that people  
9           who are thinking about suicide have a strong wish to die and a strong wish to live? Do  
10          you think that it is possible that someone who wants to die, would also really want to  
11          live?

12          *Student:* Yes.

13          *Community Educator:* That is also what we hear from research, from what people share  
14          after they may have attempted, after they have seriously contemplated suicide. After they  
15          have talked with people more deeply about their experiences, what we hear is that they  
16          actually really want to live and they really want to find a way to end the strife that they  
17          are going through. And so that to me is actually really fulfilling too. That we know that  
18          most people if they knew how to stay alive, knew how to end the emotional pain they are  
19          going through they would choose to live. We also know that most people who strongly  
20          think about taking their own life, give off really key warning signs that we can notice.

21 For both of those reasons and others, suicide can really be prevented, which is an  
22 awesome thing to be aware of.

In [Marsh's \(2010\)](#) own mapping of a contemporary regime of truth of suicide, he notes the use of rhetorical strategies in the production of truth about suicide. Several of the rhetorical strategies he identifies can be found in this excerpt. Specifically, repeated statements are made about the same repository of scientific medicalized knowledge that I referenced earlier in this chapter (see analysis of Excerpt 1). The statements about this particular body of knowledge (lines 1-3, 8-9, and 13-17) help to convey factuality, credibility, and authority about the claims made about the number of individuals who provide some external indication of suicide and the internal battle between the impulse to live and the impulse to die. Authority in these claims is further built through the application of scientific and medicalized discourse and the use of statistical measures such as percentages. Other discursive formations are notably absent. For example, there is no utterance about the young person who freely and voluntarily wants to die and is not experiencing any emotional pain. Of particular interest is how reference to the “research” creates a subject positioning from which the community educator is able to speak these statements. Lines 1, 8, 13, and 19 demonstrate how knowing and hearing *from* the “research” enables the community educator to assume the subject position of truth-teller about suicide. From this subject position, they can also be hailed as being legitimized to speak about the object of suicide. This excerpt also helps to bring some clarity about the complex circulating relations between particular forms of knowledge, discourse, and power. There is a relationship of power between the community educator as enunciator of this knowledge, drawn from scientific and medical discourses, and the young people in the classroom who are in the subject position of

knowledge recipients. For a more detailed examination of this latter analytical point, please refer to [White and Morris \(2010\)](#).

### **Suicidal Bodies: Corporeal Inscriptions of “Risk”**

This set of findings link back to technologies of objectification and subjectification. Specifically, how does a suicidal subject come to be made recognizable and knowable? My findings suggest this takes place at the site of the body through the effects of psychiatric power. A “hermeneutics of the body” ([Rimke, 2003, p. 247](#)) can be traced back to 19th century psychiatry as a means of making a subject’s interiority visible through reading a body’s surface, structure, and movement. Rimke explains that psychiatry itself was instrumental in making interiorities recognizable and knowable through the text of the human body. [Marsh \(2010\)](#) extends Rimke’s argument to the suicidal body, tracing the history of how the body has been identified as a site for diagnosing an individual’s propensity for suicide, in some cases by merely looking at the appearance of the eye:

[s]uicidal mania is easily recognized by the experienced physician. The surgeon of a large establishment in the environs of the metropolis inspired me, that in six cases out of ten he could detect, by the appearance of the eye, the existence of the desire to commit self-destruction. (p. 123)

The materiality of the body also holds relevance for understanding Foucault’s articulation of “bio-power” which as a disciplinary force helps to subjugate bodies and control populations. Foucault’s metaphor of power as extending through a capillary-like network, touching and reaching into the bodies of humans throughout their daily lives, helps situate the body as the site for the manifestation of power ([Hekman, 2010](#)). As a text for the inscription of qualities and events, the body becomes both the material effect *and* vehicle for the articulation of power. In

the case of the suicidal body, it becomes the site for the inscription and articulation of psychiatric power (see Foucault, 1973b; Rose & Miller, 1986). I will now turn to another series of excerpts to explore how the classroom talk in this program made the suicidal subject knowable and recognizable at the level of the body.

A DVD was screened during Module Three in the program. The DVD contained a dramatization of two young people. One of the young people was positioned as the concerned helper while the other played the role of a young person experiencing distress and thoughts of suicide. This dramatization was framed by a series of interviews with adults who had been bereaved by a loved one who had died by suicide, or had themselves considered taking their own life. The following exchange (Excerpt 6) follows just after the DVD screening. The students had been asked to recall as many “warning signs” as they could remember from the film and report back to the class as a whole.

### **Excerpt 6**

- 1           *Student Group #1:* Depressed. Alcohol abuse. Not participating in their normal activities.
- 2           *Community Educator:* We saw that Jason dropped out of soccer, something he really
- 3           enjoyed and now he decided he is not going to play it. That is a really good one.
- 4           Depression is a mental illness that people can suffer from and that is definitely a huge
- 5           sign. Alcohol abuse, especially if it is a big change in behaviour can be a significant risk
- 6           factor.
- 7           *Student Group #2:* Cuts. Self-harm. Dark drawing. Sad drunk boy.
- 8           *Community Educator:* If you are somebody who draws dark drawings all the time, maybe
- 9           you are not concerned. But in the film Jason was all of a sudden, drawing all these really
- 10          dark things.

11 *Student Group #3:* Pushing away. Isolating himself. Denial. Everything is all right.

12 Casual reference to suicide.

13 *Community Educator:* We saw that in the video too. Amy was pushing away her friend.

14 Pushing away people that they care about. It is something that you could listen for too.

15 “No, I don’t want to be on your team?” It could be things that you hear someone say.

16 Hiding the way they feel. We talked about how people can be hiding if they are really

17 feeling depressed on the inside. If you have somebody that is joking, throwing out

18 sentences like, “Oh nobody would care if I just died, or if I didn’t ever come back.”

19 Those kinds of sentences are a huge indicator. If you ever hear somebody doing that, you

20 have reason for a major concern.

21 *Student Group #4:* Morbid jokes. Dark thoughts. Admittance of suicide.

22 *Community Educator:* Jokes in particular, that is a valid warning sign. So a past attempt.

23 If somebody has already attempted suicide, they are more likely to do it again. And by

24 admittance did you mean, “Yes, I am thinking about suicide?” That is definitely a big

25 warning sign. If somebody outright tells you that they are thinking about it, it should be

26 taken seriously.

27 *Student Group #6:* Don’t care. Everything sucks.

My rationale for including such a lengthy section of classroom talk in my analysis is to lend further support to the analytical point I made earlier about the process by which certain claims about suicide are rendered as statements of truth. An array of means have been employed to promulgate particular accounts of suicide (e.g., through the screening of the DVD, through student re-telling, and through community educator agreement with selected student responses from the subject position of legitimized truth-teller about suicide). Means of building

authoritative accounts are at work as the classroom talk starts to focus on ways to objectively recognize and know the suicidal subject.

The recognition and knowing of the suicidal subject is made partly achievable through a gaze upon the body. The object of this arguably medicalized/psychiatric gaze can be discerned by looking closely at Excerpt 6. Suicide's close indexing with pathology is emphasized through the repeated reference to "depression" and "alcohol abuse" in lines 1 and 4-5. The inscription of depression upon bodily movement, one of the "texts" for psychiatric interpretation of the body (Rimke, 2003), can read in terms of the comments about non-participation in normal activities and dropping out of soccer. The student's reference to "cuts" is perhaps the most literal reference to how the body's surface might be interpreted as containing a suicidal interiority, an interiority which can be considered as "dark" resulting in the production of "dark drawings" or "dark things." Noticing the body's movement away from others through practices of "pushing away" or "isolation" is considered an important "warning sign" while mention of the possibility that an individual's outward presentation might not align with their internal feelings is made once more. The continuity of suicide as an object changes again in line 23, when it is formulated as an *act*, which if already tried, increases the likelihood of the act being tried again. Following this activity, these truth claims about the recognizable and knowable suicidal subject are re-told back to the students:

**Excerpt 7**

- 1            *Community Educator:* So threatening or talking about wanting to hurt or kill themselves.
- 2            Looking for ways to harm themselves. Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- 3            when that is out of the norm. Those are really ones to be really concerned about. Other
- 4            ones to be concerned about would probably show up in a combination. If they have

5 symptoms of anxiety or depression and that has you really concerned. Look into it, do  
6 something about it. Withdrawing, isolating from friends or family. Increased drug or  
7 alcohol use. Rage, anger, seeking revenge, or violence. Acting reckless. Risking serious  
8 harm to yourself or oneself. Mood changes, extreme mood changes. Feeling hopeless,  
9 helpless, purposeless, “what is the point in life, I can’t do it, I am not capable.” Feeling  
10 lethargic or noticing that they have no energy. No interest, no purpose as I said. Self  
11 injury, cutting or harming oneself. That could be in combination with things. A previous  
12 suicide attempt that puts someone at higher risk. Those people who have previously  
13 attempted are more likely than the average person who has not previously attempted, to  
14 attempt again.

The compulsory ontology of suicide as pathology (Marsh, 2010) is reinforced throughout this excerpt and in many ways has been made an inescapable and unavoidable claim to truth. Within the context of this series of statements, the only way to recognize the suicidal subject is by virtue of the presence of some kind of individualized and interior pathology that can be read through an expanding array of inscriptions including “rage,” “violence,” and “hopelessness” (lines 7-8). It would be difficult to conceive of the suicidal subject, inscribed with any of the characteristics or events spoken of above, as being rational and *not* under the influence of an internal impulse when taking their own life. In other words, the productive effect of this discourse of pathology constrains rational action. As Marsh (2010) surmises himself, “The notion of a ‘voluntary death’, of one not determined to a greater or lesser extent by mental illness or abnormalities in the personality of the individual in question, cannot be countenanced” (p. 51). There is no space for alternative discursive formations of suicide in this final and authoritative account.

## Preserving Non-Suicidal Subjecthood

Another interesting theme that emerged in my analysis was the relationship between suicidal and non-suicidal subjectivities. Looking through all of the classroom transcripts, it appears that stories and directions (students being told what to do) were used as two discursive elements to respond to issues of secret-keeping (i.e., keeping a friend's suicidal thoughts secret), responsibility and boundaries, and the limits of the helper subject position. The productive effect of these stories and directions was the maintenance of distance between suicidal and non-suicidal subjectivities. The story contained in Excerpt 8 discursively produces the objects of suicide and "depression" in an interesting way and works to create a binary between helper (non-suicidal) and helpee (suicidal) subjectivities.

### Excerpt 8

1           *Community Educator:* I will tell you another story, really quickly too . . . A girl in high  
2           school was suicidal and called her friend every night at 1:00 a.m. to talk about how she  
3           was feeling and that she was thinking about taking her own life. Every night, at about  
4           1:00 a.m. for an entire month. Any guesses what it did to her friend? It is a pretty heavy  
5           thing to be experiencing every night. The girl that was suicidal said, "don't tell anyone, I  
6           want to keep this a secret," but she would call her friend night after night. A month later,  
7           they had a double suicide planned. What had happened was that she had heard so much  
8           of this friend's depression over and over, the other supportive friend had now been drawn  
9           into it as well . . . It is an example of how easily, when you are solely around somebody,  
10          or you surround yourself with somebody that is having so much depression or having  
11          these suicidal feelings and you don't have these other healthy things in your life, it is very  
12          easy to be brought down into it. That is something that we will talk about in a few

13 minutes. How do you look after yourself? It is so important. You don't want to end up in  
14 a double suicide plan, that is for sure.

This excerpt featured toward the end of the final module of the curriculum following content about how to take action in response to a peer identified to be potentially suicidal. The multiple ways in which suicide is discursively formed as an object is apparent in this story. Specifically, the object of suicide is formulated as something that exacts a heaviness (line 4), especially when experienced repeatedly. A familiar medical/psychiatric discourse weaves through the story, again tightly indexing suicide and “depression”, constructing both as objects that have the potential to consume individuals. This exemplar stands in some contrast with much of the other classroom talk throughout the curriculum. The curriculum content just prior to this story contained a series of steps designed to help a peer make contact and engage with someone they had recognized as suicidal. There is something else being performed in this text which in some ways inferred that there is a limit to the level of contact and engagement with someone in the suicidal subject position before there is potential for being “drawn into it as well” (lines 8-9). This performance uses a powerful image that suggests the relative ease with which one can descend “down” (line 12) to a suicidal subject position, especially when external “healthy things” (line 11) are absent and unable to have a counteractive effect. The subjectivity of helper in this story is characterized as a passive victim of both suicide and depression, which results in her joining with her friend to make her own plan for suicide. Interestingly, the repeated act of making suicide visible and public by the suicidal subject has an amplificatory effect upon suicide, and as [Roen et al. \(2008\)](#) note in their own analysis, brings closer the possibility of “chaotic, suicidal subjectivities that may threaten all of our realities” (p. 2094).

In many ways, the discursive work in Excerpt 8 helps to reinforce the notion of a bounded, unitary, and individual humanist self and that it is necessary to take care of this self (line 13) by employing certain strategies to maintain some distance from and containment around the suicidal subject. Excerpt 9 helps to clarify this point.

### **Excerpt 9**

1           *Community Educator:* It is worth mentioning too, that there is nothing wrong with being,  
 2           sort of, done with the conversation if that is how you are feeling. If you are having a  
 3           conversation with someone, and it is really heavy, potentially they are talking about their  
 4           suicidal feelings, it would be awesome if we all could be able to be on and be present  
 5           with them throughout that and not feel like we are taking it on. Part of the human  
 6           experience is that feelings can get muddy sometimes, in my experiences at least.  
 7           Reminding yourself, if you need to, that their experience is their own and that you don't  
 8           have to feel that way, that can be helpful.

The talk in this excerpt featured during classroom talk about the importance of “self-care” especially in the context of supporting a friend recognized as suicidal. Here, the reading of suicide as “really heavy” (line 3) and as an object that can be mutualized and “[taken] on” (line 5) is reinforced. The notion of choice is introduced at the level of the non-suicidal subject or helper in that they can be “done” (line 1) with the conversation. Of note, the helper subjectivity is granted some level of agency. Choice reappears in the final two lines and it is inferred that by maintaining some separation and distance, the non-suicidal subject need not take on suicidal subjecthood. This serves as an excellent example of the emphasis upon maintaining distance and separation between suicidal and non-suicidal subjectivities. Suicidal subjecthood is thus rendered as individualized, unitary, and an experience bounded as “their own” (line 7). Practices of

separation and distance from the suicidal subject continue to appear in Excerpt 10, in addition to mention about sharing the “weight” (line 4) or heaviness of suicide with others and responding collectively.

**Excerpt 10**

1           *Community Educator:* Just a reminder, you are not required, you don’t have to stay with  
 2           someone if they are thinking about suicide. There isn’t some loyalty code as a friend. If  
 3           you are done, you are done. That is okay. We would just recommend connecting them to  
 4           someone else, that way they are not on their own. Nobody is expected to have all the  
 5           weight on their shoulders, just by themselves. We encourage you to share that  
 6           responsibility between people and set those boundaries, so you aren’t the only one  
 7           knowing about it. Get other people involved so that you can all help this person together.

The discursive process in this excerpt helps to further protect the non-suicidal subject position. Directions and permission both help relieve the helper of any responsibility to stay alone with someone they have recognized as suicidal. Indeed, the protection of the non-suicidal subjectivity supersedes any notion of “loyalty” (line 2) that might exist between friends. It is important to note that it is the talk in these excerpts that helps to maintain distance and separation between the suicidal and non-suicidal subject positions. At one level, it is apparent that these kinds of directions and permissions serve to encourage young people to not “go it alone” when supporting a friend recognized as suicidal. However, at another level, it is the discursive productivity of this talk that helps to create and maintain the binary and associated distance and separation between what are constructed as mutually exclusive subject positions. At this point, I will now turn to the final section of my analysis, an examination of the confessional suicidal subject.

## Confessing Suicide

The final stage of this youth suicide prevention curriculum focused on an acronym: WALK. This acronym was designed to help the students remember the key steps in recognizing and taking action in response to a suicidal peer. So far in this analysis, I have paid attention to “W” or “Warning Signs” which assist with efforts to interpret and recognize the suicidal subject. “A” or “Asking” and “L” or “Listening” are the foci of analysis for this section because I propose they directly relate to the notion of “medico-therapeutic confessional practices” (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 36). “K” stands for Konnect. The students were taught that after recognizing a potentially suicidal peer, they needed to “Ask” and “Listen” to directly find out about suicide. I argue that confession *and* attending to the confessional act with particular skills (i.e., asking direct questions and listening) underpin these steps. Further, the special knowledge associated with “Asking” and “Listening” resemble the skills required to recognize and interpret a suicidal subject through noticing inscriptions upon the body. A specialized knowledge is at work in responding to the suicidal subject.

As I discussed earlier in Chapter II, Foucault wrote about confession as a technology involved in the care of the self. Historically, confession has been associated with the verbal acknowledgment of sin in a quest for forgiveness and absolution from another. In contrast, Besley and Peters (2007) associate medico-therapeutic confessional practices with the communicative and declarative acts we perform in dialogue with another. The following excerpts serves as examples of the discursive production of the confessional act between someone recognized as suicidal and the attendant helper:

**Excerpt 11**

1           *Community Educator:* How do you actually ask someone? Why is it important to ask in a  
2           certain way? How do you listen properly and why is it important to do that?

This excerpt followed extensive coverage of the “Warning Signs” of suicide and the curriculum content was shifting toward options for taking action. Analysis of this short statement suggests that there are certain “technologies” for (a) asking and (b) listening to someone recognized as suicidal. Excerpt 12 expands upon this further:

**Excerpt 12**

1           *Community Educator:* First, let’s start with Ask. You saw in the video last time, Sara and  
2           Jason the two characters. Sara noticed that Jason was acting really weird. Drinking a lot  
3           more, totally isolating himself from his friends. Then as she followed up with him, she  
4           learned that he just got dumped, having family trouble, all sorts of these things were  
5           going through his head. He was having a really tough time. She was really worried about  
6           him. She came right out and asked him directly. We have come up with three criteria on  
7           how you want to ask someone. This might seem really simple, and it is. When you find  
8           yourself in this situation, even if you have practiced a ton, for instance our volunteers at  
9           the Crisis Centre on the phone lines, they practice, but when it comes up the first few  
10          times and you have to actually ask someone, “are you thinking about killing yourself?” it  
11          is a really tough thing to say. You are worried about what the person is going to say. You  
12          are worried about not hurting their feelings, or if it is going to embarrass them. It is a  
13          really hard thing to articulate when you are in the moment. Even though this may seem  
14          simple, we are going to practice a little bit today, to help you guys be articulate if it ever  
15          came up. The first one, “including background information.” This is evidence. Why do

16           you think they are possibly contemplating suicide? What is the reason that you think this?  
17           Are they drinking a whole bunch more than they used to? Are they not doing the  
18           activities that they used to enjoy doing? What do you know about them that is causing  
19           you to think this. The second one, and probably one of the most important is “asking  
20           directly.” One of the most common things that people do is they are really vague about it.  
21           “Oh but you wouldn’t hurt yourself right?” That is pretty vague. If somebody is possibly  
22           thinking about suicide, a lot of times they don’t want people to know, so they are not  
23           going to answer directly back. So the best thing is to ask direct, “are you thinking about  
24           killing yourself? Are you thinking about suicide?” Being really direct in your sentence.  
25           The last one “In a caring and inviting manner.” You are talking to someone because you  
26           care about them. You want to figure out what is wrong and help them out.

I have included this rather lengthy extract in full as it contains several important utterances that help discursively produce the confessional interaction between the helper and suicidal subject positions. Having interpreted the inscriptions of risk outlined in lines 2-5, the suicidal subject is recognizable, which merits further action. Lines 5-6 suggest this further action must be direct and upfront - there does not appear to be room for subtlety or ambiguity. The helper comes “right out” and asks. A contradiction appears: Though the steps to asking about suicide appear simple it is still “a really tough thing to say” (lines 10-11). The act of asking the question about suicide is framed as a risky business with the potential for a problematic confession (line 11) and the precipitation of a negative emotional response (line 12). What is being performed in this next part of the text is that suicide is an object that is difficult to talk about, even by the helper who is trying to elicit the confession, and is framed as something that is a “really hard thing to articulate when you are in the moment.” In ways that are similar to my

own efforts as a community educator to reduce any fear associated with asking about suicide (see Chapter I), a framework is offered to the helper to assist with asking the question. Concepts of interviewing are called upon, including references to the “evidence” (line 15) of inscriptions of risk and direct questioning (line 19) as a way of increasing the likelihood of an equally direct, and truthful, confession from the suicidal subject. The notion of the suicidal subject wanting to keep private and hide their suicidal interiority is reaffirmed (lines 21-23) while an invitational approach is also offered as another “technology” to assist with seeking the truth. Within this confessional interaction, the suicidal subject would then be expected to give an account of themselves in an exchange of dialogue with the helper. I would argue that through this act of confession, their suicidal subjectivity becomes further known to others involved in the process, hence further constituting their suicidal subjecthood. It is possible to discern a familiar scientific/medicalized discourse embedded within this excerpt, especially in reference to the previously mentioned need to gather “background information” (line 15) and accumulate evidence (line 16) in order to ask about suicide. It can almost be likened to the process of diagnosis where the suicidal subject confesses their problem (suicide) and reveals the “truth” in response to the helper’s skillfully asked questions. The mutually exclusive binary subject positions of non-suicidal (or helper) and suicidal are reinforced, framed by a circulating power-knowledge relation, this time at the level of the helper using special knowledge and technologies to arrive at the “truth”.

### **Chapter Summary**

I have used this chapter as an opportunity to make transparent the discourse analytic process I applied to the transcripts of classroom talk. In response to the analytical questions discussed in Chapter IV, I have attempted to examine the discursive productions of suicide as an

object within the classroom talk that took place during the implementation of this youth suicide prevention program. Suicide tended to be formulated as internal, private, and hidden, constructed as medical and indexed with an interiorized pathology (e.g., depression). I also undertook an analysis of the “games of truth” associated with the production of particular claims about suicide and some of the strategies discursively used to build authority in those accounts. Repeated references were made to an objective body of knowledge, likely scientific/medical, from which claims could be made about suicide with authority and credibility. I have included analysis of the means through which suicidal subjects were rendered knowable at the corporeal level and the productive effects of talk focused on ensuring distance and separation between suicidal and non-suicidal subjectivities. The body’s surface, structure, and movement were often used as sites for the observation and interpretation of “inscriptions of risk” that were helpful in recognizing and hailing suicidal subjecthood. Finally, I explored the presence of confessional practices in the curriculum considering both non-suicidal (helper) and suicidal (helpee) subjectivities.

## Chapter VI: Discussion and Conclusion

One very loud question reverberates around my mind as I sit and reflect upon the substance of my analysis and findings: “So what?” I can also anticipate some of the questions and critique of my work. “Are you suggesting that we don’t need to be able to identify young people at risk of suicide? How else are we going to stop them from killing themselves?” “Of course suicide is about mental illness - that is what the evidence suggests.” And perhaps one of the more tricky questions: “What will your findings do to prevent more suicides?” I am not sure I have the answers to any of these questions, and as I look back, I am not convinced I was trying to answer these questions with this study!

However, I would argue that I have achieved something with this thesis: a more vigorous stirring of the ground upon which practices of classroom-based youth suicide prevention rest. In keeping with the research aspirations of Fullagar (2003), Marsh (2010), White, Morris, and Hinbest (in press), and White and Morris (2010), I too have attempted to create some cracks and shine some light on the *contingency* of what we have come do under the banner of youth suicide prevention. In other words, I too have applied the argument that discourse is reciprocally productive and constitutive and that complex power-knowledge relations have helped formulate how we understand the objects of suicide and our efforts to prevent it.

### Summary of Findings

The main research objective of this study was to explore the discursive limits of how suicide was made intelligible within a classroom-delivered youth suicide prevention program.

This objective was supported by three main research questions:

1. How is “suicide” most usually discursively formulated within the context of a classroom-delivered youth suicide prevention program?

2. How are the discursive formations of “suicide” produced and used throughout the program? Specifically, what do the discursive formations accomplish?
3. How might Foucault’s “technologies of dominance” and “technologies of the care of the self” be applied to understanding the effects of the discursive formations?

My process of using a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analytic helped bring into relief several key findings. Within the context of this particular classroom-delivered youth suicide prevention program, “suicide” was most usually discursively formulated as individualized, private, hidden, and driven by interiorized pathologies such as “depression” or “alcohol abuse.” The construction of suicide in this way helps to reify the binary of interior/exterior and helps make suicide amenable to discovery or extraction from the suicidal subject by the non-suicidal onlooker. The manifestation of suicide as interior pathology can be linked back to the operation of complex power-knowledge and knowledge-power relations constituting a particular “game of truth” throughout the classroom talk. Through this “game of truth,” suicide is produced as medicalized and as a pathology, and relates to the second key finding of how power, knowledge, and truth interact to form particular, sanctioned truths.

There are many references throughout the classroom talk to an objective body of knowledge (i.e., research), which is situated within the scientific and medical intellectual traditions. Reference to this body of knowledge is one of the ways through which particular discursive formations of suicide are produced and used throughout the program. Specifically, “research” is instrumental in the maintenance and circulation of particular power-knowledge relations. This particular kind of knowledge positions the non-suicidal onlooker as able to recognize and know the suicidal subject. Further, this body of knowledge helped facilitate the related processes of objectification and subjectification through the use of discursive dividing

practices and the constitution of particular subjectivities (e.g., suicidal subject/non-suicidal subject). It is also worth noting how the discursive work embedded in the classroom talk helped to maintain a distance between this binary of subject positions.

The truths about suicide threading through the classroom talk had additional effects, especially in relation to the productivity of power. By aligning with the objective body of knowledge, the discursive currency of the educators' statements increases. The capillary network of power continues to extend as those knowledges are disseminated to the non-suicidal subject who is positioned as a helper. Power is then exercised through the vehicle of the non-suicidal subject while interacting with the helpee. The body became a site for the articulation of power in terms of "inscriptions of risk" as another means of recognizing and knowing the suicidal subject. Power also manifested in relation to the different subject positions of community educator, non-suicidal subject (helper) and suicidal subject (helpee). Having been used to interpret inscriptions of "risk", this same authoritative knowledge is used to ask particular questions to gain access to the private interiority of suicide potential. This was framed as a confessional practice, where the suicidal subject became more recognizable as suicidal through confessing the "truth."

These findings do align with the broader literature including [Bennett et al.'s \(2003\)](#) discursive research into the mechanistic cause-effect relationships between "depression" and suicide and [Marsh's \(2010\)](#) substantive exploration of suicide's compulsory ontology with pathology. These findings also support those of [White, Morris, and Hinbest \(in press\)](#) and [White and Morris \(2010\)](#) in relation to (a) the dominance of scientific/medicalized constructions of suicide; (b) the familiar tracings of individualistic discourses that privilege the humanist subject; and (c) the ways in which talk serves to maintain distance and separation between non-suicidal and suicidal subjectivities.

## Implications of Findings

The current regime of truth in contemporary understandings of “suicide” has been useful for “opening up many possibilities for understanding and managing self-destructive thoughts, desires, and acts” (Marsh, 2010, p. 219). Within the context of youth suicide prevention programming, it has been very assistive in supporting young people to recognize if their peer is experiencing suicidal distress. I have had experiences of students approaching me years after presentations to explain how the information they received in a suicide awareness workshop helped them take constructive action in preventing a friend’s suicide.

Similarly to Marsh (2010) and others, I also wonder if the current regime of truth helps to obscure alternative readings of suicide, especially if they depart from the dominant construction of suicide as an object that is individualized, hidden, inescapably linked to an interiorized pathology, and amenable to discovery and extraction through skilled interpretation of the body and confession. I argue that the gaze afforded by this contemporary regime of truth is restrictive and only responds to a particular unitary construction of suicide. Suicide is thus depoliticized, removed from powerful and relevant contextual forces (e.g., socio-cultural), resulting in a narrowing of how and what we think of in the name of youth suicide prevention. I propose that this has several implications for the practice of youth suicide prevention education.

If we construct suicide only in terms of an individual and internal phenomenon linked to pathology, our youth suicide prevention efforts are reciprocally designed to only act upon the individual at an internal level. The relationships between practices of oppression (e.g., homophobia, racism, colonization) and suicide become more removed from our gaze and less likely to be considered as sites of action in the prevention of youth suicide. Our research questions become more focused upon the efficacy of psy-interventions, rather than exploring

how we might intervene with our contexts to explore the potential for creating more opportunities and possibilities for living vital lives. Contemporary youth suicide prevention efforts also tend to render invisible alternative readings of suicide that could include the “suicide-bomber” or the final act of resistance by a young person incarcerated for a violent crime. As [Marsh \(2010\)](#) suggests, moving beyond only constructing suicide as the result of an interior pathology carries the potential for action to be taken at both a contextual and individual level in the name of suicide prevention and potentially expands the options for individuals to take up less lethal forms of resistance. I will now provide two examples of how these implications might be realized in the classroom.

**Disrupting suicide as private, internal, and individualized.** As I have already stated, the dominant construction of suicide as an individualized and pathological phenomenon tends to objectify the individual young person as the main site of intervention. Standing in a more resistive discursive location, what would it look like if the objectifying gaze of psychiatric power was disrupted and community educators invited scrutiny of the problem of “suicide” itself? Specifically, what might be possible if “suicide” becomes the object of analysis and close documentation? What alternative sites for taking action might be revealed? The following excerpt provides some illustration of the discursive possibilities when young people are *consulted with* in contrast to *being told* about the phenomenon of suicide. This particular excerpt is taken from the classroom dialogue of a recent youth suicide prevention workshop delivered in November 2010<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that this excerpt is not drawn from the data set under analysis for this study. It is from a workshop I delivered in the Fall of 2010. I include it here to illustrate the discursive potential of purposefully consulting with young people about the phenomenon of “suicide.” It is also important to note that the dialogue provided here is one result of the collaborative learning of the broader case study. The ( . . . ) indicate segments of the dialogue excluded for reasons of length.

**Excerpt 13**

1        *Community Educator:* What do you think provides life support to . . . or helps the  
2        problem of suicide grow?

3        *Student:* The media. TV shows and stuff like that . . . can bring the idea to your head . . .  
4        And fashion models . . . can make you feel bad about yourself because you don't look  
5        like them . . .

6        . . .

7        *Student:* Major changes in your life.

8        . . .

9        *Student:* Isolation.

10       . . .

11       *Community Educator:* . . . Given that we are so connected with Facebook, Twitter, etc . . .  
12       why are we so isolated?

13       *Student:* I think it actually has the opposite effect because there are more ways for people  
14       to feel excluded.

15       . . .

16       *Student:* I was going to say . . . isolation even in the fact that you think you're supposed  
17       to have this many friends, so you keep up trying to have 7-8 close friends, but at the same  
18       time you're not allowing yourself to get closer, or build a close relationship, with one  
19       friend, so if you're having something going on in your own life, you might not feel  
20       you're close enough to one person . . .

The question asked in lines 1-2 can be traced back to narrative ideas (see [Madigan, 1992](#)) and accomplishes some measure of linguistic separation between “suicide” and the individual. Arguably, the question creates the potential to discuss “suicide” relationally with the young people participating in the workshop, and disrupts the tendency to only think about “suicide” as being a problem inside an individual person. The question also serves to position students as *knowing* and creates space for them to provide contextually relevant ideas about how they make meaning with “suicide.” While care was taken to not over-simplify or sensationalize “suicide” in relation to measuring up (lines 4-5), life changes (line 7), or isolation (line 9), the ensuing discussion helped contextualize “suicide” and broadened the possibilities for thinking about prevention. Specifically, the students started to think about steps they could take in their school community to reduce isolation and exclusionary practices. They also identified several of the structures in their school environment that helped along the experience of measuring up. We collaborated in “making the familiar strange” and managed to have a hopeful conversation about living.

**De-subjugating insider knowledges.** One of my central findings linked to the maintenance of a singularized truth about “suicide” throughout this youth suicide prevention curriculum. Complex knowledge-power relations made particular things sayable by particular people in the classroom. Relying upon dominant forms of scientific and medical knowledge, the community educators are positioned as sanctioned truth tellers about “suicide”, in turn subjugating the knowledges of the young people participating in the program. Building upon the idea of *consulting* with students, what would it look like if community educators were intentional in de-centering themselves from being the *only* truth tellers about suicide? What kinds of conversations could take place if young people were positioned as “knowledge providers” in

contrast to “knowledge recipients”? In practical terms, community educators could be trained up to be provocateurs, charged with hosting and facilitating lively dialogue, all in an effort to call forth the rich knowledges about “suicide” that young people inevitably bring to the classroom. Furthermore, young people could be recruited as consultants in the actual development of youth suicide prevention programming, potentially yielding curricula that move beyond singularized and individualized constructions of “suicide.”

### **Limitations**

This study is a small contribution to the existing field of youth suicide prevention programming. In keeping with Foucault’s idea of a toolbox, I hope I have been able to use a few wrenches to make visible some of the taken-for-granted aspects of youth suicide prevention. While the original intent of this study was *not* to make universal or generalized claims about youth suicide prevention programming, it is still important to note that this analysis relied upon a sub-sample of data from a larger study. I have endeavoured to ensure the claims I have made are limited to the context of the classroom talk under analysis, though due to the pervasiveness of dominant discourses like medicine and psychiatry, it is arguable that similar regimes of truth would be discernible if similar analyses of other programs were undertaken. There is also an inherent circularity within discourse analytic research, implying that my own analytical work here is imbued, influenced, and framed by dominant discourses (including discourses of poststructuralism) and my own lived experiences as a youth suicide prevention educator. In my efforts to focus upon the productivity of the discourses at work in the excerpts, rather than localize analysis at the personal level of the community educators, I manage to sidestep the role of agency throughout my thesis - as did Foucault for most of his career. I do not account for the role of agency in particular subjectivities and I tend to privilege the formative aspects of

discourse. I have attempted to include some consideration of materiality, especially in my analysis of “suicidal bodies,” but there is arguably scope for more.

### **Future Research Possibilities**

I am left with a series of additional questions as I think about the implications of research. Some of these questions contain future possibilities for research and considerations for a re-imagining of youth suicide prevention practice:

1. Can we imagine a way of doing youth suicide prevention that is not solely reliant upon internalized, pathological, and individualized conceptualizations of suicide?
2. Are there alternative, richer, more expansive ways of formulating suicide, which might result in alternative, richer, and more expansive prevention efforts?
3. What other ontologies of suicide exist? What relevance do they have for prevention efforts?
4. Given that suicide *is* medicalized, how might we move toward a “post-psychiatry” (Bracken & Thomas, 2001, p. 724) or post-medical conceptualization of suicide? Is this even possible?

### **Concluding Comments**

This thesis has provided an opportunity for me to explore how a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analytic might be used to make available new and innovative ways of analyzing classroom-based youth suicide prevention program. Through this study, I have been able to challenge some of the inevitability of the discursive limits of suicide in the classroom and raise suspicion about individualizing and pathologizing productions of suicide. My hope is that my findings offer up a provocation to the field of youth suicide prevention to consider the potential of expanding our thinking *and* practice about how we might expand our gaze to respond to

questions of social justice. Above all, my intent with this piece of research was to make a small crack. After all, in the words of Leonard Cohen, “. . . there is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

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