Corporal punishment and the achievement of educational success: perceptions of learners in the South African school context

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Abstract

This article examines students' responses to corporal punishment and their perceptions of corporal punishment as a necessary form of discipline that brings benefit to individuals in their pursuit of success. By focussing on the notion of 'success' as a dominant market discourse, I describe how this rhetoric is reinforced through the disciplinary practice of corporal punishment – and how learners on the whole regard this form of punishment as beneficial in achieving their educational aspirations. Foucault's notion of discipline offers a useful conceptual framework in understanding how corporal punishment operates to regulate conduct and codify behaviour according to what is regarded as acceptable and desirable. Research findings suggest that most students who are recipients of corporal punishment display limited capacity for resistance and that students' perceptions of the effectiveness of corporal punishment, function to reinforce their construction as disciplined, hard-working and 'docile' subjects.

Introduction

Prior to 1994, the heavy reliance on corporal punishment in South African schools to maintain discipline (Maphosa and Shumba, 2010) resulted in this becoming an accepted and integral part of schooling for many teachers (Morrell, 2001). With the ending of apartheid, a human rights culture was heralded, laying the legal foundation for the ending of physical forms of punishment in schools. Despite corporal punishment being prohibited in terms of South African law, its practice in many disadvantaged, working class schools is not uncommon. The change of law in corporal punishment has been taken up differently in working class and middle class schools. While in formally white, middle class schools corporal punishment has effectively disappeared (Morrell, 2001) it continues to be enforced in a number of poor, working class schools across the country.

This article presents a description of learners' responses to corporal punishment, and discusses perceptions of corporal punishment as a necessary form of punishment in the achievement of educational success. This study emerged as part of a doctoral thesis (Silbert, 2012) which examines how the learner is imagined in neoliberal times in education policy discourse and school practice, and describes ways in which learners are able to enlist other discourses to resist interpolation. Drawing from this broader study, the article focuses on discourses of success as an effect of education marketisation, and describes how learners' perceptions of corporal punishment are linked to the accomplishment of their educational aspirations.

Theoretical considerations: the notion of success in education discourse

There is broad consensus in the literature on education marketisation that education has been fundamentally affected by market influences: Angus (2004); Ball (2004, 2003, 1990); Blackmore (2004, 1997); Bottery (2006); Comber (1997); Fleisch and Christie (2004); Gewirtz and Ball (2000); Jansen (2004); Masschelein and Simons (2002); McInerney (2003); Rasmussen and Harwood (2003); Sachs (2001); Simons and Masschelein (2006) and Whitty and Power (2003) address the impact of school restructuring and marketisation for school principals and teachers. Biesta (2004); Gewirtz and Ball (2000); Masschelein and Simons (2002) are interested in the impact of marketisation on social relations and subjectivities within the school and Barnett, Clarke, Cloke and Malpass (2008); Hamann (2009); Masschelein and Simons (2002); Olssen (2003); Read (2009); Schmidt and Wartenberg (1994) and Steiner (2008) examine the production of new subjectivities associated with neoliberalism. In much of this scholarship, market discourses are viewed as representing particular ideas of success and productivity that are absorbed into, and deployed through the school's discursive formations and practices.

The notion of success has come to dominate what Bernstein (1975) refers to as the 'expressive order' of the school. This relates to the school's disciplinary mechanisms that are configured to produce learners whose conduct and behaviour comply with a normative set of constructs. The school's expressive order represents a range of discursive formations that infiltrate the school from the public domain. In addition to national policy discourse, the media is a key mechanism through which market discourses

infuse the school. After the release of the 2009 matriculation results in South Africa, the headline of an article published in the Business Report of the *Cape Times* stated the following: "Matric result is economic failure" (Enslin-Payne, 2010, p.15). In this article the director-general of the Department of Labour and president of the Black Management Forum was quoted: "The learners of today are the economic managers of tomorrow. If they are not well-equipped we are signing our death warrant". Such messages overtly construct the learner as 'product' and attribute to this construction particular actions and behaviour that are enscripted in economic discourses. As Jansen (2002, p.42) suggests, post-1994 education reforms were "lodged clearly and consistently within powerful economistic rationales as the overriding motivation for 'transforming' apartheid education".

The economist rationales of South African education are rooted in the 1981 De Lange Commission report, which focused its attention on the private sector's role in schooling and the need to train young people for the economy (Jacklin, 2011). Although the commission was not immediately implemented, its significance was two-fold: first, its principles reflected a similar economic-based logic to those articulated in international education reforms during that time; and second, the report provided an economic-based rationale for education policy post-1994.

As argued in the larger study on which this article is based, it is these economistic rationales that circumscribe the way in which the South African learning subject is imagined and it is this imaginary that permeates the school's discursive terrain. The 'ideal' student, as suggested in the original thesis, is the future economic participant, the individual who is primed to take his/her place in the labour market. In this article I am interested in the ways in which corporal punishment functions as a disciplinary instrument in schools in the production of learning subjects, and in perceptions of corporal punishment by learners as a necessary form of discipline. The intention of the article is to problematise students' responses to corporal punishment, which as will be shown, is mostly regarded by them as beneficial in their pursuit of success.

Foucault's (1977) notion of discipline offers a useful conceptual lens through which to view corporal punishment as a regulatory mechanism in the shaping of the subject. This is explored in more detail in the section that follows.

Foucault: Discipline, discourse and the subject

Discipline in the Foucauldian sense refers to a type of *regulatory power* that codifies behaviour according to what is regarded as acceptable and desirable. Rather than operating as a top-down imposition of power, disciplinary procedures serve to normalise and regulate conduct, as stated by Foucault (1977, p.24):

> . . . punitive measures are not simply 'negative' mechanisms that make it possible to repress, to prevent, to exclude, to eliminate; but . . . they are linked to a whole series of positive and useful effects which it is their task to support. . .

As an institution emerging within the modern nation state, the school is a critical structure in which power is exercised through discipline in order to produce a particular type of subject. The term 'subjectivity' as used in this article refers to the ways in which the individual is constituted within a particular social and political context through the discourses that are made available, and through the disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms employed within that context.

Discourse is regarded as a form of sense making, through which the social production of meaning takes place, through which power relations are maintained and through which the subject is constituted (Kenway, 1990). It represents a complex set of practices and is the medium through which power operates, regulating expectations and actions, and defining behavior accordingly. The subject is constituted therefore through discursive and institutional interactions.

Significant in the Foucauldian notion of the subject, are the constitutive practices he refers to as 'technologies of the self': the processes by which individuals *act upon themselves*, and form themselves as subjects. These strategies constitute ways in which individuals' understanding of themselves in terms of *what is expected of them* is internalised. The capacity of subjects to act upon themselves or engage in self-government is contingent on the subject's capacity to act or perform actions (Foucault cited in Rabinow, 1994). Foucault described this self-fashioning as ". . .the government of the self by oneself in its articulation with relations with others. . ." (1994, p.88). As a result the subject engages in constituting him/herself in a particular space in relation to the discourses and power relations encountered. As Prinsloo (2007) suggests:

> It is from the available repertoire of systems of ideas that people can constitute themselves and be constituted in the process. Possible 'imaginings' are enabled through the available discourse in circulation at a particular time in a particular space (2007, p.192).

It is through the self-fashioning process that subjects come to internalise values and norms through accepting, desiring and aspiring to achieve congruence between personal internal objectives and objectives that are external to themselves (Edwards, 2008). Subjectivation therefore requires that the individual be invested with capacity, freedom, utility and productivity. In order for the body to be acted upon it must be subjected or made submissive. The term 'docile' is derived from the Latin 'docilis' meaning teachable (Hoskin, 1990), signalling the exercising of discipline to regulate behaviour. Goodson and Dowbiggin (1990, p.105) suggest that in order for relations of power between 'professional and client' to be legitimised, there must exist "both a 'discipline' and a mode of disciplining self, body, emotions, intellect, and behaviour" (1990, p.105). They quote Foucault, who asserts, " 'the disciplines' become 'general forms of domination' which create subjected and practised bodies, 'docile bodies' " (1990, p.106).

Viewed within a Foucauldian framework, corporal punishment may therefore be understood as a regulatory mechanism, oriented towards the production of learners as docile, useful and productive. This suggests an important way in which disciplinary mechanisms operate through the school and how they are embedded in dominant discourses, which are taken up, reinterpreted and re-contextualised in school practices. Such discourses privilege certain values and produce particular subjectivities.

Research methodology and approach

The study was designed as a qualitative discourse analysis. Texts were constructed from interviews, and Foucauldian discourse analysis was used to interpret the themes that emerged from the interview texts. This type of discourse analysis made it possible to explore the formation of subject positions in discourse and to examine discourse patterns that have become normalised. Moreover Foucauldian discourse analysis offered a tool through which to describe the school's dominant discourses; the ways in which these discourses have been transmitted through disciplinary mechanisms or 'rituals of power' (Jabal and Rivière, 2007) and how through these discursive processes, subjects are constituted.

Research methods, data collection and analysis

Interviews were conducted with fifteen randomly selected grade 12 learners and ten educators (including the principal). The student participants comprised eight girls and seven boys. All the pupils were isiXhosa first language speakers and lived in local townships. All travelled to school using public transport.

Pseudonyms were used at all times, both in referring to the participants and to the school itself. The school selection was purposeful rather than random: Ubuntu High was one of the two schools selected for the doctoral research on which this study is based. Both schools used in the original study were specifically chosen because of their fundamental differences with regard to their socio-economic status and their standards of performance, my objective being to show through the data, that social processes and the effects of discourse are contingent upon the social context. Secondary schools were chosen as the interview questions focused on ways in which participants had been shaped and influenced by their schooling. The choice of grade 12 learners as interviewees was based on the understanding that young people in their final years of schooling have greater capacity to reflect on their secondary school years, while simultaneously having begun, in many cases to look forward toward their future.

For the analysis of interview texts, an interpretive, thematic approach was used. Overlaying the analysis of texts, I was concerned with dominant themes and patterns. Important to state is that the doctoral study did not set out to explore corporal punishment, or the effects thereof. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the study was to describe the imagined learner in neoliberal times and the ways in which the learning subject is constructed in education policy and school practice. What emerged unsolicited from the interview process at Ubuntu High, was learners' accounts of instances of corporal punishment. This was then developed as a dominant theme from the data.

The responses that were elicited from the interviews generated the data for analysis. All references to coproral punishment from the larger study comprise the data used in this study, and are represented in the sections that follow.

Validity and reliability

The construction and interpretation of interview texts exposes the study to particular threats to validity, including in particular, descriptive validity, interpretive validity and generalisability (Maxwell, 1992). 'Descriptive validity' (1992) firstly was achieved by ensuring that the recordings accurately reflected the participants' responses. Interviews were professionally transcribed and transcripts were checked by participants for accuracy. This process sought to address, to some degree, a second possible threat, namely 'interpretive validity', which pertains to interpretations of meaning and is based on the language of the participants. Because discourse analysis was the chosen methodology, value was placed on the particular words and sentences used by participants. However, as Maxwell (1992, p.290) suggests, "accounts of participants' meanings are never a matter of directed access, but are always *constructed* by the researcher(s) on the basis of participants' accounts and other evidence". This is significant within a Foucauldian context as the meaning that is constructed and communicated by subjects is based on individual perceptions which are socially and historically constructed. All views expressed were regarded as subjective responses and were thus considered valid and 'truthful'.

A related threat to validity with regard to the interview texts, was the interpersonal dynamic between the interviewer and the respondent. An understanding of that dynamic, "how it affects what goes on in the interview, and how the informant's actions and views could differ in other situations" is, according to Maxwell (1992, p.295) "crucial to the validity of accounts based on interviews". Similarly, the language in which interviews were conducted was regarded as a potential threat to the reliability of the data. Because English was not the mother tongue of the speakers (albeit the medium of instruction at the school), I considered using a translator in the interview process. Once the interviews began however, it was apparent that this was not necessary as pupils were comfortable to be interviewed in English and were able to express themselves easily. Although participants responded with confidence and ease of expression, throughout the interviews I was aware of the potential limitation of language.

A final validity threat relates to generalisability – the degree to which the study can be generalised to other contexts, both empirically and theoretically. I do not make the claim that what happens in the instances described in this

study may be applied generically to other instances, either empirically or theoretically. However in similar socio-economic school contexts in which discourses of success are dominant, and where corporal punishment is enforced, students' capacity to speak out against physical punishment may be compromised on account of corporal punishment being regarded as necessary in the achievement of educational success. This suggests that regulatory processes and the effects of discourse are contingent upon the social context in that discourses are taken up and interpreted differently in different contexts.

Ethical considerations

The ethical concerns in this study pertained to issues of confidentiality with respect to the participants and the school. As mentioned, pseudonyms were chosen for the respondents, and for the school. Interviews were only conducted if pupils had agreed to being interviewed and written consent had been given by parents. In an effort to uphold the anonymity of the school, salient details which may have resulted in the school being recognisable, were removed from the data.

Having outlined the methodological approach; data collection; validity and ethical considerations, the discussion shifts to the school as the research site. In the next section the case of Ubuntu High is introduced, after which the findings are discussed.

Ubuntu High

Ubuntu High is a disadvantaged, underprivileged school located in a mixed residential and business area. Although functional,[1] Ubuntu would be described as a relatively poor performing school.

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[1] Functionality here refers to schools in which systems have been implemented to ensure that teaching and learning takes place. Teachers mostly arrive for their classes on time and most students are motivated to perform well.

More than one thousand learners attend this school, most of whom are Xhosa speaking with a small percentage of foreign national students. The students who attend Ubuntu live in the townships located on the outskirts of the city and rely on public transport, many travelling far distances across the city to get to and from school. The appeal of this school for many township youth is because of its perceived functionality as compared with the majority of schools in the local township communities. Perceptions of success are associated with its location: a seemingly far distance from the scourges of township life, and a stone's throw away from some well-known tertiary institutions. Despite the school's location, Ubuntu is an under-resourced school. There is no school hall and many of the fifty classrooms are constructed out of basic pre-fabricated material, resulting in extreme temperatures throughout the year. This, coupled with an average of forty-five to fifty students in each class makes for difficult learning conditions.

Despite poor facilities and overcrowded classrooms, messages of hard work and success were prolific. Newspaper articles mounted on the walls of the school foyer conveyed different stories of success. One article was entitled 'Celebrating success after all the hard work', while a second title stated, 'Hard work earns Matric boy hard cash'. This article described how one pupil received a cheque of R1 500.00 from the Western Cape Education Department for five distinctions for his 2009 final matriculation examination results. Cash incentives for the top achiever, was a recently introduced practice at Ubuntu as some of the teachers pledged to contribute towards this monetary award. Messages of hard work and success were frequently reinforced during the school assemblies, as suggested for example by the principal who explained to the student body during one assembly that hard work meant being 'present', 'prepared' and 'punctual'. These habits, if achieved, would generate success:

> You must be present, prepared, punctual in order to be successful. Time is marks, and marks is money. . .

In spite of promises of a brighter future and dreams of success, Ubuntu High is a disadvantaged school confronted with similar challenges as those experienced in townships schools. As will be shown in the discussion that follows, dominant discourses of hard work and success permeated the school's discursive framework – and were reinforced daily by the school's close proximity to a number of tertiary institutions.

Findings

School location

The physical and psychological effects of travelling out of the townships into a mixed residential,[2] inner-city location influenced learners' self-perceptions. The impact of the daily movement from poor, challenged communities across the city into an area populated with businesses, schools, tertiary institutions, and student residential establishments enabled Ubuntu students to re-imagine themselves as aspirant, upwardly mobile young people. The physical location of the school positioned Ubuntu inside the margins of a middle class 'virtual community', which as Dowling (2009) explains, represented the students' 'aspired destination' as opposed to students' 'origins and intended destinations'. In the opinion of Lizo (a teacher), the school was no different to other township schools – except for its location:

> Fortunately for us, we have . . . an unfair advantage . . . of the position of our school . . . as the school . . . is not different from the schools in the township, but it's just that where we are . . . we give them that sense of pride. They are proud to say that (they) are studying at Ubuntu. You can tell from how they dress, they wear their uniform, you can see that there is a difference between them and a learner in the township schools, as much as the set up of the school is more or less the same as the township schools.

Because of the school's close proximity to tertiary institutions, pupils were exposed to opportunities that would otherwise not have been available to them. As Tina (student) says:

> There are many, many opportunities and they push us to the limit . . . For example, in our school, the main focus is for us to go to UHL[3] 'cause they think that is the greatest university available for us as. . .

Aspirations of success were linked to admission to a tertiary institution – and in particular to UHL. In this sense the rhetoric relating to UHL functions as an 'affiliation strategy' (Dowling, 2009): entry into the 'virtual community', as mentioned earlier, becomes possible through admission to one of the most reputable institutions of higher learning.

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[2]   This refers to an area which is both residential and business. In the case of Ubuntu High the location comprised a mix of classes and cultures.

[3]   UHL is an abbreviation for The University of Higher Learning. This is a pseudonym.

The physical location of the school, together with its perceived quality of education, resulted in frequent comparisons by teachers and students of Ubuntu with top achieving schools in the suburbs. Such comparisons, which functioned to set Ubuntu apart from, and 'above' township schools, were integrated into the school's vernacular, serving to position the Ubuntu student as special and different. As illustrated by a teacher during a ceremony in honour of the top matriculants from the previous year:

> Whatever happens in private schools, it does happen here. We are a township school in (the suburbs). We are producing quality at its best. . .

The claim above that Ubuntu was comparable with private schools validates McLeod's (2000, 507) notion that "mimicry is mistaken for the 'real thing'". According to Kenway and Bullen (2001, p.147) the process of emulation involves a double movement: "an imitation of those richer as well as differentiation from those poorer or less refined". These authors maintain that discourses of desire and success become part of the school's lingua franca as the school models itself on those schools perceived as superior.

The subjectivation of the Ubuntu students as 'different' on account of the school's location is linked with attributes of being hard working and aspirant. Measures of success were closely related to normative constructs of 'being good' which meant providing material support to the family and community. These sentiments are reiterated by Vusi (a student) who expressed the desire to study engineering and thereby to become a 'better person':

> So like, after I've passed like matric, I've done a tertiary institution, I want to be a better person. That's why I thought engineering . . . it's a serious place for me to be.

When asked what he meant by wanting to be a 'better person', Vusi said that he would help "those who could not help themselves". 'Being good' or 'better' defined students' conceptions of success which related to providing support to their families, and service to their communities. Throughout the interviews, students made the connection between education and the achievement of future dreams and goals, recognising their school as a morally empowering key to future success. Hard work meant access to university which was regarded as the springboard to upward mobility. Admission to university was considered the ultimate success, the prerequisite being hard work which meant being 'present', 'prepared' and 'punctual'.

It is against this discursive background of the aspirant Ubuntu High student that the discussion now shifts to corporal punishment and the extent to which this disciplinary practice served to reinforce normative constructs of success.

Corporal punishment at Ubuntu High

In this section corporal punishment is examined in relation to Foucault's notion of discipline: a mechanism that regulates behaviour according to that which is regarded as desirable within the school's discursive framework.

The biggest problem at Ubuntu, as explained by most of the respondents, was that of late coming. Because the school was located 'out of community', many of the students travelled daily for between one and two hours to get to school, and to return home. At Ubuntu, the practice of corporal punishment for late coming may be regarded as a *visible* disciplinary mechanism representing external displays of power, through which attempts were made, as Foucault suggests to transform and improve subjects (Foucault, 1977). Referring to disciplinary procedures in general, Foucault stipulates that "[t]hese methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body. . . assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility. . ." (1977, p.137). The docility-utility synthesis signals the relationship between discipline and success, suggesting that corporal punishment at Ubuntu converged around normative discourses of success: the objective being to improve behaviour and increase performance – and the result, the construction of a disciplined, obedient and compliant subject.

Learners perceptions of the *purpose* of corporal punishment were based on the idea that teachers were doing "their best" in trying to make students "more disciplined" (Sandiswa, a student). In the opinion of Sakhiwo (a student), in order to have respect they needed to be taught when they were young. With regard to the *effects* of corporal punishment, all except one student agreed that the outcome was positive. While Elias (a student) felt that students were now "taking things seriously" and passing their exams, Amanda (a student) maintained that "smacking [put] you in the right direction", motivating students to work harder. These incentives were coupled with the opinion expressed by Zoe (a student), that because of the physical pain of corporal punishment, it was considered an effective deterrent. Kwezi (a student), similarly, condoned efforts by the school to discipline learners:

. . .it works for me, because there are no other ways that I can see, that can make students be what the school wants them to be. So, the, the disciplinary actions that take place are perfect.

According to Sakhiwo corporal punishment was regarded as a necessary form of punishment for a 'black child':

Yeah, they, they're doing their best. They're beating us when we are late, and they, I, I see that as, that's a good thing, because we, um, we as black child, they always tell us that, um, in order for you to. . . have respect, we must like, we must teach you when you're young, like and here, they, they beat us, which is a good thing. . .

Sakhiwo' defence of corporal punishment on account of being black draws attention to the effects of particular positionings and the place of schooling in reproducing subject positions. Kwanda, a teacher, shed light on the subject position of working class children within what he referred to as 'a culture of submission':

We serve children from the working class and the way in which children from the working class grow up . . . dispositions them in one way to be . . . less vocal . . . If a parent gives an instruction, it is the nature of working class (children) to follow that instruction as it is coming from an adult . . .

Although more critical of corporal punishment, Sandiswa believed it would never end, because it made the students more obedient.

I think they are trying to like, make us more disciplined. But, to some of us, it's not, it doesn't feel right, because, maybe some of us are not used to being punished in that way at home . . . I don't think corporal punishment will ever really end at school. Because they, the kids are mostly obedient when it's reinforced. . .

Sandiswa's reference to obedience aligns with the Foucauldian notion of docility and utility. Through being disciplined the body becomes more obedient and concomitantly, more useful. The association of docility and utility is contingent on diminished power as the subject is primed, in a particular way for economic participation. In this sense, according to Foucault (1977):

[d]iscipline . . . dissociates power from the body; on the one hand it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection (1977, p.138).

At Ubuntu High, the compliance resulting (in general) from being 'beaten' was equated with students' need for discipline and respect. This, students agreed would impact positively on academic performance, equipping them with the prerequisites for admission to university, and ultimately supplying them with the required currency for economic participation.

Tina was the only student interviewed who was resolute about the futility and injustice of corporal punishment:

> At the back of your mind you say, they will beat me at 8 o'clock, by 9 o'clock that pain will be gone, so what the hell, maybe I should be late . . . no it's not good for us to be beaten up. I don't want to be beaten up. When I'm late, I'm late for a good reason . . . they don't ask me why I'm late, they just come around and beat me up. So it's not a good punishment. They should do something else, like, if you're late, you should, I don't know, clean the school or something.

While others felt it was a deterrent because of the physical pain, in Tina's view, corporal punishment by its very nature was *ineffective*: because the physical pain was short-lived, the transgression would invariably be repeated. Corporal punishment therefore had the opposite effect for Tina: instead of rendering her obedient, it provoked resistance:

> The discipline has made me resilient. I'm not a resilient person. I'm a quiet and shy person, but when somebody's keep on beating me up, the same with, like, not asking you why you're late and stuff like that. That makes me want to speak my voice and, and, and speak out.

Tina's response offers important insights regarding processes of power and subjectivation. She described herself as being 'quiet and shy' yet had become 'resilient' and wanted to 'speak out'. This invokes the Foucauldian notion of power, which is not unidirectional but circulates at multi-levels, positioning subjects in particular ways in relation to its manifestation (Foucault, 1977). As Foucault suggests,

> power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them; is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, as in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them (1977, p.27).

In becoming subjectivated, Tina became empowered - attempts to render her compliant resulted in her resistance. Yet paradoxically Tina regarded her behaviour at Ubuntu as having improved: "I'm punctual toward things. I understand things. I discipline myself towards situations. I don't react (fast)".

This apparent paradox aligns with Foucault's notion of power: although relations of power imply *certain possibilities of resistance*, this, according to Foucault never takes the form of a total rejection of power or changes in power relations (Schmidt and Wartenberg, 1994). Although Tina resisted commonly shared perceptions about the benefits of corporal punishment, she attributes her improved behaviour to the school's approach to discipline. Tina's subjectivation demonstrates the effective operation of disciplinary practices at Ubuntu High. Significantly however, although she is subjectivated by broader disciplinary processes, she is able to disrupt dominant discourses by exercising her freedom as a subject. This she does by working within discursive formations to destabilise them.

Conclusion

At Ubuntu High the successful student was the student who passed his/her final matriculation exams and obtained admission to study at university. Corporal punishment in this context represents a disciplinary practice through which education aspirations are reinforced.

The lack of resistance to corporal punishment in most cases, signals the construction of the 'obedient subject'. In referring to disciplinary procedures in general, Foucault (1977, p.128) speaks about the 'apparatus of corrective penalty', which acts through the body and the soul. Disciplinary instruments comprise ". . .forms of coercion, schemata of constraint, applied and repeated". Ultimately, as suggested, through these normative corrective techniques, an obedient and utilitarian subject is constructed. The construction of the *obedient subject* at Ubuntu High illustrates the effects of corporal punishment in reproducing subject positions and relations of power. Because power implies a *free subject* – and concerns relationships between free subjects – obedience negates possibilities of resistance and therefore undermines freedom. The project of the self according to Foucault is not to escape relations of power, but to exercise resistance by working within dominant discursive formations:

> I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent transaction but to acquire the rules of law, the management of techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible (Foucault, 2000, p.298, cited in Christie, 2006, p.449).

Foucault stresses the point that power relations are possible "only insofar as the subjects are free" (Foucault, 1984, p.292) and that this means that within power relations there is "necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance . . . there would be no power relations at all" (1984, p.292). The point that needs to be emphasised is that resistance is intrinsic in every relation of power, since power implies a free subject. Although the subject is constituted through discourse, it is perpetually open to the possibility of critique. According to Gunzenhauser (2006):

> The practice of freedom . . . is a stance in relation to certainty, an incredulity toward foundations and essences, a radical appreciation for 'persistent critique' St. Pierre 2002, not for the sake of critique but for the possibilities that arise (2006, p.254).

The task of the subject therefore is not to find ways to escape the discourses but to "acquire the rules of law" (Foucault, cited in Christie, 2006, p.449) and to work *within* discursive formations to shift them. The exercise of freedom is to wedge cracks within the discourses; to expose and destabilise them so as to render them "permanently open, permanently contested, permanently contingent" (Butler, 1995, cited in Christie, 2010, p.4). The capacity to expose and rupture discursive practices and to assume alternative positionings marks the point of resistance – the moment at which the self becomes actively engaged in subjectivation processes. Recognising that obedience regulates behaviour according to what is considered desirable, the task of the subject is to work within discursive formations to shift and disrupt them, as demonstrated by Tina.

In this article I have argued that young people who have been subjugated through unequal relations of power have limited capacity to resist dominant discourses. In the post-apartheid South African context where practices of violence have become normalised, it is particularly difficult for young people to express their agency and speak out against corporal punishment. Moreover, students are even less inclined to demonstrate resistance if physical disciplining is perceived as generating success or benefit to the individual. At Ubuntu High, support by students of corporal punishment was based on perceptions that this form of punishment would lead to improved discipline and performance, which would result in them fulfilling idealised constructs of success. Over and above perpetuating physical acts of violence and subjugation, corporal punishment operated at Ubuntu High as a regulatory mechanism which reinforced and reproduced normative constructs of success in the shaping of the Ubuntu High student.

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