

Re-working Empowerment as a theory for practice

Michael Wallengren Lynch

Department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

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Abstract

This paper explores power relations in the classroom and subsequently seeks to re-work empowerment as a theory for practice. The discussion is located in a practice setting where an intervention for school children with behaviour and concentration difficulties, delivered by the author, was researched as part of his doctoral thesis. The works of Michel Foucault, seen in this paper as a post-structuralist, are tied together with those of the pragmatist John Dewey in an effort to re-work an understanding of empowerment that can withstand current social work practice tensions of power and control. This theoretical argument is illustrated by referring to qualitative data gathered from vignette interviews conducted with the students at two time points in the research. The concluding position in this paper is one of seeing empowerment in a more robust manner that can incorporate a post-structuralist understanding of power relations and yet allow space for the possibility and development of human agency.

Keywords

Empowerment, post-structuralism, pragmatism

Introduction

The social worker in the school setting, as well as other professionals such as the teacher and the school psychologist, has a key role to play in helping students manage issues of behaviour and concentration (Barkley, 1996). Through the research carried out for his doctorate thesis, the author of this paper evaluated the combined intervention of a behavioural modification approach and biofeedback, applying an empowerment focus, to meet the behavioural and concentration challenges of 13 students aged between 7 and 12. The concept of empowerment draws upon relevant multi-disciplinary (e.g. sociology, psychology, social work and

Corresponding author:

Michael Wallengren Lynch, Department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg, Box 720, 40530 Gothenburg, Sweden.

Email: Michael.lynych@socwork.gu.se

pedagogy) perspectives and can be seen as an umbrella term that connects efforts for personal and group self-fulfilment. Within that context, this paper argues first that empowerment can be seen as an effort in countering normalization tendencies in the classroom, and second that empowerment can be seen as promoting freedom through self-regulation. That is not to say that normalization is purely negative in itself rather the controlling aspect, reinforced by factors external to the student, can have the effect to disempower the student regarding their own abilities to manage their concentration and behaviour.

In this sense, self-regulation can be seen as an empowerment practice through which students can take control of their behaviour and concentration in the classroom and in this context can be defined as self-generated thoughts, feelings and behaviours that are planned and cyclically adapted based on performance feedback to attain self-set goals (Zimmerman et al., 1999). In general, self-regulated learners are proactive learners who incorporate various self-regulation processes (e.g. goal setting, self-observation and self-evaluation) with task strategies (e.g. study, time-management and organizational strategies) and self-motivational beliefs (e.g. self-efficacy and intrinsic interest).

This paper examines power relations in the classroom of the students studied by applying Michel Foucault's arguments on power and normalization. Then, based on John Dewey's take on pragmatism, it will present a revised sense of empowerment by connecting it to a pragmatist approach. Data gathered from the students at the start and end of the intervention will be used to illustrate a practical application of this theoretical bridging.

The intervention in question was composed of two approaches. The first a behavioural modification approach, known as Family Class (FC), which works with students and their families in a school setting. Within each group, there is with a maximum of six students who together with their parents attend school (within the regular teaching schedule) for 4h once a week for 12 weeks. The main feature of the FC experience is focused on students receiving regular marks from their home-class teacher ranging 4 to 1 during the normal class time, reflecting how well they do with respect to their goals. During the FC gathering, the students discuss their weekly performance and receive support on how they can improve their score for the next week. The other method, Biofeedback, is a way of working that gives instant feedback to the students on how their body is performing physiologically (in this instance, heart rate) through the use of a computer-based program that gathers and presents heart rate changes back to the user. The students become successful on the computer program by regulating breathing and focusing thoughts. It is considered in this research that FC represented an externally focused perspective and Biofeedback an internal one.

Post-structuralism, empowerment and power

The insight offered by a post-structuralist perspective allows for a critical analysis of empowerment. A discussion on the various facets of post-structuralism or even

the myriad of positions on empowerment in social work (e.g. Miley and DuBois in Askheim, 2003; Dominelli, 2002; Gutiérrez, 1990; Helmersson and Jönson, 2015; Jordan, 2004; Shera and Wells, 1999; Tew, 2006) or 'deep empowerment' (Macdonald and Macdonald in Shera and Wells, 1999: 51) is outside the scope of this paper. Even the effort to define both terms is an arduous task. The former refers to theoretical positions largely in debt to socio-linguistics, philosophy and the works from Derrida, Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault and Kristeva to mention a few. It can be said that all is not well with empowerment in current day social work. Jordan (2004: 16) forecasts that 'practitioners in state services (and their managers) will increasingly face the frustrations and failures of their practice, if it pays lip-service to autonomy, choice and empowerment, but actually deals in rationing, risk-assessment and court orders'. As such, it is important to have an empowerment theory that can reflect the genuine best wishes of the social worker for her/his clients yet also remain grounded in practice realities.

For the purpose of this paper, I focus on the works on Michel Foucault, who rightly or wrongly, is categorized by some as falling under the post-structuralist banner (see Wendt and Seymour, 2010). Of the great array of possible implications of the associated theories, at least in realizing how power works, I will propose how it can be useful to help us understanding power in the setting of the classroom. Put more specifically, the purpose is to understand how power is manifested in the classroom so that afterwards empowerment can be understood with reference to a social work practice setting.

Methodology and methods used in the research

In order to explore the multiple realities of how the intervention impacted on students with behavioural and concentration difficulties, a single-case study with mixed research methods provided the opportunity to hear from students, parents and teachers. Single-case research design has a 'long history of application throughout the social and educational sciences and has contributed greatly to the empirical basis for a variety of practices' (Kratochwill et al., 2010: 125; see also Schottelkorb and Ray, 2009). In terms of the qualitative approach, vignettes interviews with students were used in an attempt to identify how students perceived issues of hyperactivity/inattention, conduct, emotions, pro-social and peer relationships. The students were read different scenarios related to above issues regarding fictional students and subsequently asked for their responses. Further open-ended questions sought to illicit insight to their own perception on how they experienced behaviour and concentration in the classroom. The qualitative data were examined via a thematic approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Applying a Foucauldian perspective to power relations in the classroom

In this section, I argue that focusing a Foucauldian lens at empowerment theory is a useful exercise to ensure that empowerment is critically reflected upon.

Not questioning empowerment can be dangerous and potentially dis-empowering of clients (Wendt and Seymour, 2010). This section will also present data from the vignettes to illustrate how the students in the study verbalized power relations before the intervention commenced.

Foucault (1997: 55) argued that disciplinary power ‘emerged with the rise of modern institutions and spread throughout society’ such that the continuities of power relations are evident not only ‘in schools, hospitals, prisons, factories and other institutions but also outside institutions’. In Foucault’s view, the macro realm of power shifts to the micro level of bodies. Gore’s (1995: 166) research, using a Foucauldian framework, had the

contention that the apparent continuity in pedagogical practice, across sites and over time, has to do with subtle but pervasive exercises of power relations, in educational institutions and processes, that remain untouched by the majority of curriculum and other reforms.

She goes on to say that ‘educational researchers have paid little attention to this micro-level functioning of power in pedagogy’, something that this research sought to address.

In order to try and understand what empowerment can mean on an everyday level, it is relevant to examine the power relations at the core of ones interactions with others. This paper is interested in the power relations between the adults and the students and how this is expressed by the views of the students and behaviours witnessed by the adults. Foucault viewed power as a ‘dynamic energy, which requires continuous production at multiple sites, making it unstable at the local level’ (Kennan, 2001: 219). This nonlinear view of power expresses something more than a one-dimensional understanding of a ‘top down’ power. Instead, Foucault sees power as existing everywhere and in everything we do. So, for instance, the social worker in the school role is working on different levels of power relations with the students, his superiors, his peers, the political and the personal level. This also means that potential for action within the student’s life is possible. This power can work in a number of ways and it is through the categories outlined below that the data from the interviews with the students will be examined. These processes of hierarchy, normalizing judgment and examination, ‘create[s] and cause[s] the emergence of new objects of knowledge and accumulate[s] new bodies of information’ (Foucault, 1980: 51).

Given that empowerment can be seen as a core value for social work, one needs to engage with power and give voice to those clients in vulnerable positions (Hasenfeld, 1987). Power is an integral part in the relationships social workers form with clients. As Foucault (1991) would suggest, power is present in all facets of human life and results in the control of populations and individuals. By applying Foucault’s earlier work, we would be justified in arguing that any interventions in a school setting have an end point in the control of the students through ‘governmentality’, resulting in docile subjects (Peters, 2002). Foucault (1980)

argues that the practices of power regulate subjects through a process of self-regulation and self-discipline. Subjects collaborate in the policing of their own lives. So for Foucault, self-regulation by students is a manifestation of political power, not empowerment. Pease (2002) suggests that being open to the 'stories of others' and to our own interpretations *of* those stories, we allow space for resistance to dominant power discourses.

The FC system, the intervention analysed in this research, is a behaviour modification program that uses a point system that draws its effectiveness through commodification of behaviour. With that in mind, Foucault (1980: 58) theories invite us to question 'what kind of body does the current society need' or 'what does FC suggest about the mind and body controlling nature on the school system'? More specifically in relation to this research, what kind of student is the school trying to produce? We can get an indication of the ideal-type student by some of the goals that are set for children in FC:

- Sit still in your chair;
- Hold your concentration for at least 20 minutes;
- Raise your hand when you want to ask something;
- Show respect to adults and your fellow classmates.

The goals suggest that the premise of the intervention is to create a student that is docile and behaves according to a understood norm. In many ways, one could argue that being docile and obedient are required for everyday classrooms and that as an intervention FC has an unstated objective to control some of these students for the benefit of the teacher and the rest of the class, who may be disrupted by their actions. This process of 'governmentality' makes explicit the influence others have on the formation of the individual self. It also draws the supposition that self-regulation and self-knowledge play a crucial role in the internalization of power relations and control. Rabinow (1984: 7) states that Foucault looked to 'create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects'. Foucault (1997: 77) follows up this theme in 'Discipline and Punishment', where he states that,

He who is subjected to a field of visibility and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles, he becomes the principle of his own subjection.

From a historical perspective, the rise of centralized governance brought with it a need for the new technologies for the fostering of life and 'the growth and care of populations become a central concern of the state, articulated in the art of government, a new regime of power takes hold' (Rabinow, 1984: 17). Foucault names this as the period of bio-power, which has a deeper focus on the body as a site of potential control. The aim of this bio-power is to force a 'docile body' to be

subjected, used, transformed and improved (Rabinow, 1984: 19). This has echoes in the normative effect of FC intervention that focused on rewarding good behaviour and being critical of negative. That said, it also could be applied to using biofeedback that has a focus of creating self-knowledge as an internalized means of control (Heller, 1996).

The tension with the notion of empowerment for the social worker is often coupled with the awareness of the normalizing effects of one's actions and with the desire to facilitate empowerment. Standardized education and behavioural treatments programs (e.g. the intervention here), from a Foucauldian perspective, are essential components of the technologies of normalization. They play a key role in the systematic creation, classification and control of 'anomalies' in the social body. Foucault (1980) sees the process of offering support to people outside of the norm as being operated through different technologies of normalization (i.e. hierarchical and normalizing judgement) that serve to isolate anomalies. Once they can be identified and isolated are normalized through corrective therapeutic procedures. The question is therefore: can empowerment survive the pervasive technologies of normalizations, and if so, what does it look like?

In the students' responses to the vignettes, there are clear examples of the 'hierarchical' and 'normalizing judgment' perspectives in practice. For instance, a hierarchical perspective on power is evident when one student in the study (Student (S) #2) commented in response to a vignette scenario, that 'adults must also say something to her and try to calm her down. Like, for example, maybe get her to sit with a friend and help her do things she doesn't really understand'. Power relations for this student can be seen from a top down perspective, reinforcing the student's less empowered position. The student's advice to the child in the vignette was located in the external world in the sense that outside agents are seen to facilitate possible change rather than it coming from within. The data also showed examples of Foucault's 'normalizing judgments' category. The 'normalizing judgments' are manifested in statements, which suggest the ways in which people 'should behave' and 'should be' like the comments from one student (S#10) who stated that 'she needs to calm down and take it easy, she should stop throwing things'. Within the hierarchical and normalizing judgment also lies the panoptic condition, whereby the subject 'inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection' (Foucault, 1991: 120). Foucault used Bentham's style of prison as a way to illustrate the use of discipline as a function of power. This describes the surveillance and control elements of institutions, such as prisons and hospitals. In schools, the students are observed, monitored and controlled both by the teacher and the students themselves leading to 'no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time' (Foucault, 1991: 143). One student (S#9) articulated this, when in response to a vignette scenario, he commented that perhaps 'she could have someone who watches her and says to her when something is not right'. This image is a potent one in that it suggests the portrayal of dependence by the child on an adult managing the child's behaviour and suggests that the student's view of his own resources was not

considered. The adult is viewed as a restricting and powerful force that can control and punish, exemplified by one student when he commented: 'Talk with her. . . or say to her that she will not get any break if she does not sit still' (S#8). Most of the students gave some indication that they knew how the students 'should' behave and all but one was able to suggest strategies to help, such as 'say to her or stop her, you can try and ground her in some way' (S#8).

The main theoretical argument in this paper is that by solely using a Foucauldian perspective one can end up leaving the students ultimately disempowered. This follows from the logic that empowerment, through the promotion of self-regulation, can be seen as yet another feature of the technologies of normalization. For this author that position can be problematic. Houston (2010: 1739) attests to this when he suggests that 'Foucault's anti-humanist and decentering view of "agency" leaves little room for the exercise of intentional acts of resistance or proactivity that shape or challenge prevailing discourse'.

However at the later stage in his career, Foucault began to integrate a more productive view of agency, without actually stating the potential of the subject, when he focuses more on the idea of 'self-knowledge' as a more interesting truth game as the subject is established relationally (Seitz, 2012). This is a new view for Foucault in comparison with the idea of fixed subject that is acted *upon*. Foucault's version of ethics, also known as by the term 'practices of freedom', can be understood as the behaviour required of an individual so that the actions are consistent with the social norm, such as the 'well-behaved student'. In Foucault's work, there is the desire to master one's own self, such as the Greeks displayed in terms of seeking and controlling pleasure (Foucault, 1988). However, crucially, the motivation here, to a large degree is the impact of the public shame and disapproval that is levied by the community towards the self. As a result, it is in the opinion of this author that the using a Foucauldian approach to understanding social work practice can be problematic when empowerment is also considered relevant.

Empowerment as freedom from within

In this section, I will draw together some thoughts on Dewey and Foucault to offer a reformulation of empowerment theory. This section will also present some data from the vignettes to illustrate how the students in the study verbalized power relations in the classroom at the end of the intervention.

First, I will present the some of the views of Dewey in order to show how he can contribute to the core arguments of this paper. As Broadhurst (2012: 298) points out, 'when we unearth the early work of those such as John Dewey, we find a strong ameliorative impulse cognisant with social work's project of improvement in individual and collective wellbeing'. Broadhurst (2012: 294) goes on to argue that by 'drawing on classical pragmatism and focusing on the work of John Dewey, (. . .) lessons from this early work offer explanatory precepts for understanding the possibilities of human agency'. In contrast to Foucault's, somewhat dehumanized view that interventions in schools could be seen as exercises of domination, with the

aim to make students docile, Dewey was interested instead in how education can help create empowered, self-thinking student who realizes their own potential in democratic educational settings. As Greene (1973: 47) argued '[children] who [have] been motivated to succeed [have] almost always been the [children] whose belief in [themselves] and [their] future [have] been sustained and reinforced by [their] family and by society'. This value belief is at the core of his work. Dewey considered that real life problems should be at the heart of education practice (Dewey, 1938). Through a 'cultivation of the individual' (Dewey, 1938), one can motivate a conversation of change with a student and equip them to offer a challenge to effects of labelling that often happens for students with behaviour and concentration problems (Prawat, 1997: 16). This conversation is further advanced through embracing self-realization practices, such as 'developing the process from the private to the social, from impulse to intelligent habits'. Through 'psychologizing' with the student education can then become more meaningful and experimental (Smith and Girod, 2003: 297). The pragmatic approach of teaching the school subject (e.g. Maths and Geography) through the 'lived experiences of students, rather than its codified disciplinary form' (Smith and Girod, 2003: 303) can also be transferred to ways of delivering interventions, which seek to help students with challenges and empower their experiences.

Dewey tried to break the distinction between knowing and doing. Genuine inquiry, he argued, is the key to achieving this goal. Through 'genuine inquiry knowing slides over into doing, (thereby) lessening the distance between the two' (Prawat, 1997: 19). Therefore, in this study, it was important to examine whether the students studied *knew* some possible methods of how to manage behaviour and concentration. This is an on-going challenge for education, therapies and many disciplines, which work with people in the building of skills. Dewey proposed that the major catalysts to learning are 'ideas'. And it is through ideas that a democratic citizen is shaped (Dewey, 1938). However, it is not just lofty aspirational ideas that inspire good educational experiences for students but the action component of the ideas as 'action is at the heart of ideas' (Dewey, 1988: 134).

For Dewey, the human being has to interact with the environment and other people in order to reach a state of moral peace and stable well-being by transforming one's idea and values into efforts and actions. Essentially, Dewey wanted students to participate and not be passive. School must help to develop an individual's potential through a multitude of ways, such as developing intellectual power, moral responsibility, social awareness and ethical integrity. Psychological resistance to their perceived difficulties is the aim of creating a self-reflective student who regulates their own behaviour. The result, or at least the aim, is for students who are empowered by the knowledge and action that they can impact their own reality. A student in this sense draws on her past experiences and knowledge in order to make sense of a problematic present situation. She first deliberates about the possible actions she can take, imagining the consequences that could arise from each possible action before she arrives at a hypothesis. However for Dewey, a self-outside of all association with society was absurd. Because Dewey saw individuals as made up

of multiple selves, he understood another goal of schooling to be the promotion of balance and integration across an individual's multiple associations (Schutz, 2011). He argues, sharing a view with Foucault that much of the education of people has focused on normalizing students rather than educating them to think for themselves.

Dewey was concerned with the factors which help us understand when the 'self becomes more reflexive of itself. That is those moments when habit breaks down or when habits clash, and the self is forced to monitor itself reflexively' (Burkitt, 2002: 220). Within this context, knowledge is concerned with actions and consequences. For Dewey, the human being was to be conceived as an organism, a fusion of mind and body, and essentially as a creature of habits on the one side of the coin, and as a set of beliefs on the other, where habits and beliefs are but obverse 'pictures' of one another (Marshall, 1994). The term technology, also used by Foucault, can be seen as a form of the practical accompanied by practical reason, which aims to instil in the body certain habitual actions and later, to give people the reflexive powers to reason about their virtues or skills, providing them with the capacity to refine, modify or change them. In other words, technology is a means through which humans produce not only products and works but also themselves as humans in both their reflexive and non-reflexive aspects.

Foucault and Dewey do not see truth as absolute. Both were interested in the 'transactions' in reality (everyday interactions, or in Foucault's word 'relations'). In moving away from a dualist perspective on reality, Dewey 'put forward a framework that starts with interactions – or, as he later preferred to call it, transactions – taking place in nature and in which nature itself understood as a "moving whole of interacting parts"' (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010: 106). Dewey's definition of 'knowing' had to do with 'the transformation of disturbed and unsettled situations into those controlled and more significant' (Dewey, 1929: 236). Both Foucault and Dewey share a critical view on power and control in society but the latter 'emphasizes the moral possibilities of solidarity in democratic community, Foucault emphasizes the dangers of power and knowledge' (Garrison, 1998: 112). In Dewey's thinking, the act of self-creation 'creates better community and better communion with the individual, others took precedence, whereas for Foucault, community and individual others were secondary' (Garrison, 1998: 114). As a result, for Dewey, the objective of education was 'to acquire a mind which means to become able to participate productively in the discourse practices of a culture' (Garrison, 1998: 124) whereas it is considered that Foucault's final subject was a 'narcissistic selfish creation carried out by egotists determined to achieve complete detachment and autonomy from others' (Garrison, 1998: 128). By engaging with students and the families, one can have a knock on effect on the whole community. All that is required is the school to open its doors and engage with the outside world.

At the end of the intervention, the students in this study expressed a combined approach in that students referred themselves, through actions they could take, and to the teacher as a source of regulation when it came to managing behaviour and

concentration. This approach reflects a post-structural take on power relations and yet allows space for students' empowerment through their own ability to self-regulate. The following examples exemplify this point,

What I would have done, I would have gone to her (teacher) and asked, can I go out and run a couple of laps around the school because I have got too much energy in my body. So I would run like 2 laps around the schoolyard, so then, if we had like a group room where she could sit in peace because she is throwing things at her friends and stuff, I would ask could I sit a little outside because I am disturbing my friends when I throwing my eraser and stuff... So because after you don't have that feeling in your legs and you are quite calm. (Student #1)

In this situation, it is the student who is regulating his own behaviour rather than the teacher telling him what to do. However, not all students referred to physical movement. Some suggested that the individual could think differently. For instance, one student stated that he 'think(s) about (his) goal sheet' (S#3). Some of the techniques discussed in the intervention of FC and Biofeedback, i.e. breathing correctly and thinking positively, were referred to in many of the post-intervention replies. For example, one student (S#5) commented that the child in the vignette should,

Maybe just think about not being angry because it will just make you stressed. You can ask if she wants to join in a game or something, so she stops being angry... if I was angry, I would do like this (breathes in and out).

On further questioning, the student states 'that is when I am angry I can do it and I can stop being angry and I can manage it... you must to think also if you want to calm down and stuff'. The external motivations are of course still present. For example, another student (S#1) comments that as a way of helping the vignettes child to calm down, that

If she is able to be finished with everything really fast, in that case that she can get to choose something she wants to do... don't mean what she wants but maybe she can draw or something.

In addition to the external focus, the student also referred to the internal,

She should try to calm herself, and think about herself... She could try and sit down and think about something else... when she thinks, she can think about herself and that a lot can happen if she does not concentrate... She could go to the teacher and speak with her and if she has a little problem with concentrating in the classroom. She can ask if she could go to little room, and be on her own... Maybe she wouldn't be so angry then... even if she is still angry maybe she can get over it.

This student had also felt that over course of the intervention, he has learnt 'to control my anger, first I try and not think about what happened, I think about other things, then I breath in and out'. The data suggest that these students had formulated different responses to the problems poised in the vignettes and had also put into practice some of the techniques themselves.

This was also exemplified by another student (S#4) who explained the improved levels of his concentration were due to the fact that '(I) learnt more about myself'. This self-awareness can help the student identify what works for them. For instance, one student (S#12) felt,

Maybe if he is looking out the window, my tips would be that, look at something which makes him feel calm, like that tree, and then turn back and start working again...so that he feels calm and that he is not going to be easily distracted...I feel really calm when I look at that tree (outside his classroom).

Another student (S#6) indicated that he applied the knowledge gained during the intervention when he advised the student in the vignette that 'he can concentrate for like, max 10 minutes, and take a breath, then talk with the others then he can work again, for another 10 minutes'. The student had developed an increased ability to be aware of his actions and to self-regulate accordingly when he claimed that he 'usually looks at the clock in the classroom'. His self-awareness stretched to recognizing that he was aware when he loses concentration 'when I talk, when I have spoken for too long... Sometimes they (the teachers) say it to me, sometimes I know myself'.

What Foucault does not give us is what Dewey wanted to give us – a kind of hope, which does not need reinforcement from the idea of a transcendental or enduring subject. We can choose to see the world as governed by technologies of normalization, or we can see it the way social work ought to see it, full of potential, agency and hope. Dewey offered ways of using words 'like "truth," "rationality," "progress," "freedom," "democracy," "culture," art," and the like which presupposed neither the ability to use the familiar vocabulary of what Foucault calls "the classic age," nor that of the nineteenth-century French intellectuals' (Rorty, 1982: 159). In the words of Rorty, although 'Foucault and Dewey are trying to do the same thing, Dewey seems... to have done it better, simply because his vocabulary allows room for unjustifiable hope, and an ungroundable but vital sense of human solidarity' (Rorty, 1982: 163). Broadhurst also advocates the viewpoint that human agency needs to be re-engaged, so that the hope that Dewey offers can be realized in current social work practice:

(the) radical decentering of the human subject which depicts the human condition as essentially passive-subjects are simply the conduits, bearers or sites of discourses of power/knowledge. If we accept this latter formulation of the human subject, then we are indeed lost in the face of an expanding neoliberal project. (2012: 296)

Empowerment theory, in the context of this research, also receives a revitalization following the engagement with Dewey after the challenge provided by Foucault's arguments. The sense of hope, an emotion that fuels empowerment, is given space to flourish, a fact necessary for the facilitation and reception of empowerment practices. The theoretical outcome of this is an understanding of empowerment theory that includes the awareness of the mechanism of control and normalization and yet finds a space in which the students can empower themselves through self-regulation. Furthermore, this theoretical position was reflected in the intervention itself, providing a tangible example of the often-elusive link between theory and practice.

Conclusion

This paper has brought together aspect of the works of Foucault and Dewey in the context of self-regulation seen here as a means to self-empowerment. Foucault's earlier work, such as on the process of subjectification and normalization, was used to highlight power relations within the classroom. It was also argued that Foucault's approach does not position the individual (i.e. the student) as a subject who can better their life situation, thereby presenting a challenge for the value base of social workers. By applying a post-structuralist viewpoint, in this instance a Foucauldian perspective, a deeper awareness of the power dynamics in delivering an intervention was discussed. It was argued that in order to have a pragmatic and realistic application of empowerment in schools, a critical discussion on power in classroom relations needed to first take place. The introduction of Dewey into the mix, it was argued, matured an approach to empowerment theory that can link self-regulation to positive change. It was argued that the connection between self-regulation and empowerment is a comfortable fit with social work practice and values, in that it has an optimistic focus that embraces a pragmatic view on empowerment. Schools, as well as social work practice sites, are a 'complex and multi-layered set of shifting contractions and continua between myriad different definitions' (Schutz, 2011: 268). Therefore, the subsequent analysis is not a matter of having either a solely Foucauldian or a solely Dewey perspective. The theoretical framework presented in this paper, relevant to wider social work contexts than just this research setting, provides a novel approach to capturing the power relations between students and teachers and the promises of increased self-control on the part of the student. This approach can also be used for any social work/client interaction that seeks to involve an empowerment perspective, ensuring that the social worker endeavours to be mindful of the ever-present power relations. The data presented showed the students orientating their responses to both external and internal points of view, a fact reflecting the theoretical argument in this paper as well as the intervention itself. As a result, it was argued, empowerment theory, from the perspective of this research, is given a secure foothold in that power relations are considered and accounted for within a framework of empowerment via student self-regulation.

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