

WORKING PAPER NO. 70

**‘I’d rather be hit with a stick...  
Grades are sacred’:  
Students’ Perceptions of  
Discipline and Authority  
in a Public High School in Peru**

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# Abstract

This working paper discusses views and experiences of *discipline* and *punishment* in everyday schooling among a group of boys and girls aged between 14 and 16 years old, who are attending a public high school in an urban Andean city in Peru. It draws on data collected using a range of qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with students, their parents, teachers and headteacher; group discussions with students; and class-, school- and home-based observations.

The findings suggest that punishment is the cornerstone of the disciplinary system within the school setting and therefore shapes social relationships between the different agents involved, including students, teachers and parents. The school environment defines students as actors who lack authority and voice; they are there to obey the rules imposed by the headteacher and teachers, and if these are not observed, students are penalised. The high school studied, far from presenting itself as a democratic institution, reproduces hierarchical relationships and ends up being fertile ground for the imposition of will through physical and verbal aggression, not only between teachers and students but also among the students.

In this context, the paper highlights how the use of physical violence seems to be justifiable for children and for teachers, as a natural resource to deal with any situation of conflict. Negotiating is not part of school relationships; obeying is. Obedience is seen as a valuable lesson for students, by students themselves, the headteacher and teachers in the school education process. It is also noted that the school was understood as an institution that had the authority to discipline the students in its own way, even if they did not agree with the sanctions applied. The students don't expect to live in an anarchic world – they demand rules and organisation, but don't want rules to be unfair.

There is no consensus in relationships inside the observed school and this only ends up generating transgressions and alternative forms of relationships: students learn how to 'get around' the system that has been imposed by paying the teachers for better grades<sup>1</sup>, escaping from school, fighting, etc. As the paper shows, the main strategies of correction used in the school are associated with punishment, through verbal sanctions and often corporal punishment, including hitting students with sticks. These interactions take place despite the fact that physical correction is banned according to the school's own regulations. In that sense, physical punishment practices are inflicted on a practical level but prohibited on a discursive level; leading to the school becoming a daily transgression space where the rules and coexistence are separated and not related and where masculinity seems to be associated with physical strength.

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# The Author

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## About Young Lives

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The views expressed here are those of the author(s). They are not necessarily those of, or endorsed by Young Lives, the University of Oxford, DFID or other funders.

<sup>1</sup> Students pay the teachers for a fresh chance to do a new exam; they solve it at home and usually get better grades and replace the first grade.

# 1. Introduction

'By being victims, perpetrators and witnesses of violence, children learn that violence is an acceptable way for the strong and aggressive to get what they want from the comparatively weak, passive or peaceful.'

(Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, quoted in Jones et al. 2008:6)

This research study was conducted within the framework of the Young Lives international study, known in Peru as Niños del Milenio. Young Lives is an innovative longitudinal research project that studies the changing nature of child poverty; it follows the lives of 12,000 boys and girls from Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam over a period of 15 years (2000–2015), using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

This paper examines the perceptions and experiences of some of the children studied with regard to the disciplinary practices in a public school located in the Andean city of 'San Roman'<sup>2</sup>, in the Puno region. On the basis of these perceptions and experiences, we analyse how these students build their own concept of discipline and authority through their views of the different punishments they receive in the secondary school. As we discuss later in the paper, corporal punishment and mistreatment seem to be common practices in large portions of Peru's public education system; however, the ways in which these practices are understood vary significantly. For this reason, it has been crucial to take into account the social and cultural context of this Andean province.

In a press note of 2006, UNICEF estimates that every day, hundreds of Peruvian children are physically punished by their parents, teachers or anyone who considers this conduct normal and necessary (UNICEF 2006). In the same document we learn that most victims of physical violence do not show up in statistics unless they have been seriously injured, because this form of punishment is regarded as a normal disciplinary and pedagogical tool. A survey of students and teachers by Save the Children in Lima (STC: 2002) reveals that 18.8 per cent of children and teenagers are physically and psychologically abused in schools, and 29 per cent at home. According to the Ministry of Women and Social Development – MIMDES (MIMDES: 2004),<sup>3</sup> the kinds of violence inflicted on children under 18 years of age include psychological abuse like insults, screaming or threats (73.1 per cent), corporal punishment such as slapping or whipping with a belt (43.9 per cent), and sexual abuse (23.9 per cent). A study by the Ombudsman's office (Defensoría del Pueblo<sup>4</sup> 2009a), indicates that out of the 80 substantiated complaints that were investigated by them:

The largest number referred to physical punishment (29 complaints). These abuses were inflicted by the headteacher, teachers and assistants and consisted of pulling students' ears and hair, pulling, slapping, hair cut without parental consent, students hit with a stick or ruler (...). Secondly, there were complaints related to physical and humiliating punishment of the students by the headteacher, teacher and assistants (20 complaints (...)). Thirdly, there were complaints that mentioned emotional mistreatment and related to

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2 In this working paper the name of the city will remain anonymous; it is replaced by the name of the province where it is located.

3 The data come from local offices of MIMDES called Centros de Emergencia Mujer (CEMs) ('Women's Emergency Centres').

4 The Ombudsman's office in Peru is an autonomous constitutional body whose mission is to protect the fundamental and constitutional rights of citizens, as well as to oversee the compliance of the public administration with its duties to citizens.

humiliating punishments (26 complaints). These abuses and punishments have also been made by the headteacher, teachers and staff of the institution. (2009a: 225).

*Learn without Fear*, noted a study conducted in Peru by Bardales and Huallpa in 2004, with more than 2,000 boys and girls from both public and private schools, showed that 13 per cent of the children interviewed had been victims of physical aggression in school. Of these, 59.3 per cent reported they were punished using belts, sticks or ropes, and 40 per cent mentioned being punched, pinched or pushed.

In spite of these figures, it is worth acknowledging that Peru shows progress in the legal protection of children's rights in the face of abuse and violence. For instance, in 1990 the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified; in December 1992, the Code of Children and Adolescents was approved; in 2002, the National Plan for Childhood and Adolescence 2002–2010 was also approved; and in 2007, the Ministry of Education passed and published the ministerial resolution No. 405-2007-ED, approving guidelines in cases of physical and/or psychological abuse, sexual harassment and violation of sexual freedom inflicted on students in educational institutions.

The Ombudsman's office contends that despite the legal progress against these forms of punishment, there is still no adequate legislation to ban these practices in a more explicit way. For this reason, such cases are still occurring, so much so that the 2009 Code of Children and Adolescents includes the term *corrección moderada* ('moderate correction'), which according to the Ombudsman's Office could lead to an acceptance of 'humiliating' forms of physical punishment as legitimate disciplinary methods.

Educational institutions are part of society and thus mirror its interactions to a certain extent (Durkheim 2002). Within educational institutions, conflicts of everyday life are generated and reproduced. The ways in which conflict is dealt with in such institutions invites reflection on the disciplinary system that regulates coexistence within the society those institutions belong to. How is discipline being enforced in schools? How is discipline understood and how does it intervene in education?

The present study explores the disciplinary practices of a particular high school, with a focus on the views of the students themselves on school discipline. Moreover, the study intends to explore how school discipline (and the system of sanctions) works as a symbolic system linked to the social order.

Studying one of the most prestigious public educational institutions in the district enables us to understand the cultural conception of discipline existing in that context and to consider the perceptions of authority and the power relations reproduced in it.

The present paper begins by discussing the methodological and theoretical approaches of the research project. Immediately after that, it provides a brief description of the social and family contexts of the students we worked with. In the third part, I describe the school that was the object of our study, and its disciplinary system and practices. In the fourth section, students' perceptions of the use of discipline are analysed. In the fifth section, we gather and study student perceptions on teacher authority in daily school practice. In the final section, we discuss the social and cultural context of the area with the purpose of better understanding certain concepts of discipline, violence and authority. We conclude with a few reflections on the project's main findings.



## 2. Approaches: methodological and theoretical

### 2.1 Methodological approach

The sample of children surveyed by Young Lives in Peru is distributed across 20 departments; additionally, in four of these departments, qualitative data has been gathered since 2007. A significant finding made in the first round of data gathering conducted for the qualitative study was the presence of physical punishment as a means of correction in public schools (Ames et al. 2009). This was especially common in one of the four qualitative sites in the province of San Roman, and among high-school students.

On the basis of the results of the qualitative study, the site of 'San Roman' was selected for the present study. The name of the city where fieldwork took place has been replaced by a pseudonym that corresponds to the province where it is located: 'City of San Roman'.

Through my work on the qualitative research, I established contact with boys and girls of both age groups studied in the four provinces: Rioja, Andahuaylas, San Roman and Lima. This helped my fieldwork in the selected area since I had previously met and created links with the boys and girls and their families.

In this research project I worked with 12 students, both boys and girls, in the fourth grade of secondary education, who were aged between 14 and 16 and who studied in the same secondary school.<sup>5</sup>

Since this research focuses on information gathered in a school context, it was important that the teenagers we selected, belonging to the qualitative Young Lives sample, were enrolled in the same school. By 2009, five teenagers (three male, two female) of the qualitative sample were attending the fourth grade in the same high school. The fact that five out of 12 children from the qualitative sample went to this school suggested that this was a popular school in the province, something we could confirm later on when we learned that the school had a selection process because of the high demand from prospective students. In 2007 I had the chance to visit the school and meet the headteacher, thanks to the class observation programme conducted for the qualitative study. This made my second visit possible in 2009.

This study followed a qualitative and ethnographic approach; for this reason, the voices of the students were collected and documented by using several techniques for the gathering of qualitative data: in-depth interviews with students, parents, teachers and the headteacher; group discussions with students; and class-, school- and home-based observations. In order to conduct group discussions, non-Young-Lives children who were in the same grade as Young Lives children were invited. In other words, a total of five Young Lives children and seven boys and girls from the same class participated in the two group discussions (see Table 1 for details of methods used). It was decided to separate the groups by gender,

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5 In Peru, the sample includes approximately 3,000 boys and girls and consists of two cohorts. The first cohort consists of approximately 2,000 children who by the year 2002 were between 6 and 17 months old. The second cohort consists of approximately 750 children who were aged between 7.5 and 8.5 years. In 2009, the year the present research was conducted, the first group was aged between 6 and 8 while the second was aged between 14 and 16. We worked with the group formed by the older children.

having a group of boys and a group of girls, because this would generate greater confidence and openness to dialogue; in their own school, boys and girls study in separate classrooms, as explained in the next section.

**Table 1:** *Qualitative methods applied to research*

In-depth interviews with children	5
In-depth interviews with parents	5
Interviews with teachers	5
Interview with headteacher	1
Group interviews with children	4
Classroom observation	30
School observation	18
Home observation	10

Group interviews focused on gathering information about discipline at school and the practice of physical punishment both inside and outside school, in the community. Personal, in-depth interviews had the purpose of collecting information related to student–teacher relations, as well as peer relations and student perceptions of authority. Regarding observation, in total we observed three fourth-grade classrooms over the course of two-and-a-half weeks; we also conducted school observations for one month and, finally, daily-life observations of the five children who belonged to the sample. The purpose of this last task was to spend more time with the students out of the school space, to become familiar with their activities and to talk to them about their relationships with their peers in out-of-school spaces.

In that sense, this paper will discuss, in a general way, our main findings among the students' perceptions. The fact that they are all in the same grade makes them share similar experiences in the same context; nevertheless, we will stress the singularity of specific student discourses when necessary.

Taking into account the general framework of Young Lives (Morrow 2009) and ethical considerations for qualitative work (Ames, Rojas and Portugal 2010) it was explained to children that this research was aimed at finding out what they thought of their school, their teachers and their peer group. As the findings of a qualitative study had indicated the presence of corporal punishment in school, it was felt that children should know that their identity would be kept secret, and that the information they provided could not be used to identify them or describe their life in particular, but would be used to explain daily life in a public school in San Roman province. All children's names in this working paper are pseudonyms.

Parents of children in the Young Lives sample gave their verbal consent, which was recorded. Children who were not part of the project and participated in group interviews took a letter of invitation to their parents. All group activities were conducted in an environment provided by the school headteacher and conducted outside school hours.

It is also worth mentioning that the study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Nutrition Research Institute (IIN), one of the executing agencies of the Young Lives project in Peru.

## 2.2 Theoretical approach

Explaining what I mean by 'discipline' demands taking into account that the meaning of the word varies according to time, place and modes of application. According to authors such as Foucault, historically, discipline consists in facilitating the operation of different institutions, but the ways in which the individual is led to comply with the regulations of those institutions vary. In some cases discipline acts by means of rational persuasion, but in some others – most, perhaps – it involves coercive strategies imposed on the body, appealing in certain cases to perfectly rational justifications (Guerrero 1994). For example, by the 15th century, with the emergence of the Renaissance, a burgeoning literature referring mainly to child-rearing practices and tips for training during the first years of life notes the need for corporal punishment in order to repress children's evil inclinations. Therefore corporal punishment was considered the main instrument to influence and modify children's behaviour (Defensoría del Pueblo 2009b).

The different strategies enforced in the education of boys and girls have varied as time goes by and the understanding of childhood changes. A child was understood as 'a being of selfish nature' (Hobbes 1987, Locke 1986), whose will has to be educated and subdued through physical punishment (Gimeno 2003). In the 20th century the child began to be seen as an individual endowed with rights and responsibilities. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child by the League of Nations in 1924 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 were fundamental steps in this long process.

From my perspective, discipline, and in particular school discipline, is linked to strategies of control applied to maintain order. These strategies are not restricted to the enforcement of rules, but extend to the control of the body itself. Foucault noted (2004: 141) discipline includes methods that allow a meticulous control of the body's functions, ensure a constant subjection of its forces and impose a state of docility; a docile body is a subjected, harnessed, transformed and perfected body. However, school discipline reflects the aim both of *physical/body control* and that of teaching and learning. Its methods of application relate to two factors, as Guerrero (1994) mentions: coercion and consensus. Thus, following Guerrero, there are two ways of understanding discipline: one oriented toward obedience and another toward consensus and coexistence. Although for Guerrero discipline is aimed at either one or the other approach, within the Peruvian school we believe both practices exist together, even though they seem contradictory. The application of discipline in public schools in Peru has been mainly focused on obedience and controlling the body. Historically, and because of the continuing presence of the military in power, the state has encouraged the exercise of body-oriented military discipline. Trindad (2006: 33):

The partnership between education, exercise and militarism, not only as a means of control but also for the country's development, is not new. In this regard, Manarelli argues that after the defeat in the Pacific war, the image that was built was that of Peru as 'a country weakened, maimed and lifeless'. This image was sought to be reversed by following the advice of doctors, as their scientific knowledge would transform the 'morbid and weak society into a virile and powerful country'. Thus, exercising the physical body and strengthening the social body meant to 'invigorate the nation's body'. But doctors were not only the representatives of this position, women educators also focused on the body in order to, 'clean, educate and organise' it as a fundamental condition of achieving the desired civilization.<sup>6</sup>

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6 All the quotes have been translated by the author.

Therefore, obedience seems to be the axis of discipline in the Peruvian system of public education. Along similar lines, studies such as those by Trinidad (1999), Benavides (1997) and Uccelli (2000) point out that discipline is understood as an external imposition. For this reason, its practices are based on physical sanction as a means of correcting deviant behaviour.

Now then, Peruvian schools, as Callirgos points out:

are designed to reward those who follow a set of rules and duties, and to penalise those who cannot follow them satisfactorily... The school supposedly rewards those who study more, show a better performance, behave in a more adequate manner and obey the rules of their institution. (1995: 2)

Those who do not obey are penalised or punished through aggressive tellings-off or other strategies involving verbal or physical violence. Ames (1999) believes corporal and verbal control are everyday realities in rural public schools, and therefore can be seen as a dominant trait of the school institution.

For Ansi3n (1994), the various forms of punishment applied in school as tools of imposed power come between the student and the teacher, breaking communication. As Pierre Bourdieu (1995) noted, this reduces pedagogy to symbolic violence, imposing upon the children a narrow world view that displays itself as natural. In general, all kinds of punishment, as Guerrero (1994) believes, make explicit the need to subdue the individual's will, since his or her behaviour is feared as a threat to the status quo. The students submit to discipline out of fear of being sanctioned either symbolically or physically (Trinidad 1999).

However, we also believe that obedience and compliance with standards in educational institutions do not occur only because of fear of punishment but are also used as a strategy to deal with a particular social space with rules and norms of conduct. In other words, the individual lives within a space of internalised surveillance (Foucault 2004).

The forms of punishment and sanction observed in the secondary school in San Roma were usually related to physical violence or verbal aggression. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that the present research also acknowledges another type of violence, identified by Bourdieu (1999), namely symbolic violence. For Bourdieu, symbolic violence is not implemented through physical coercion but through the several symbolic means that configure our minds and produce meaningful action. The concept of symbolic violence allows us to examine more closely the ways in which the same schools, via their practices and regulations, perpetuate violence (Waldron 2009). Symbolic violence is enforced by making use of the same symbolic forms adopted by the dominated and the subdued to interpret the world; this implies that they simultaneously know and ignore its violent or imposed nature. Therefore, when asked, students will say that is OK to be beaten, or to be forced to exercise, or that they do not have an opinion, etc. They recognise violence as negative, although it is identified as part of their interactions. This understanding of symbolic violence enables further reflection about students' perceptions of the sanctions they face in school.

The web of relationships in educational institutions helps us to reflect on power. Crozier and Friedberg (1990) noted that power, at any rate, always implies a few individuals (or groups) acting upon other individuals (or groups); where acting upon the other implies acting upon oneself. In this way, in the present research project, power is understood as a relationship between agents where their 'possibilities of action' are in play. In other words, no single agent is in possession of power; there is rather a situation of permanent negotiation in which conflict is part of the student-teacher dynamics. In this web of relationships, the concept of 'authority' we understand and share is defined not as a built-in attribute of individuals, but

rather as an element given and created by these relationships. Authority is granted, but can also be taken away. In that sense Guerrero (1994) shows, if those who have accepted authority from someone later oppose that person's right to give orders, their compliance with rules lies not so much about the rules themselves but rather the ability of individuals to exercise discipline and punishments to keep individuals in their corresponding status: obedience.

Even though discipline in schools, and student perceptions of it, is not a new topic in our country (Guerrero 1994; Benavides 1997; Trinidad 1999; Ames 1999; Uccelli 2000; Ansión 2000), I consider it useful to rethink it in order to verify possible changes over time, especially because of the fact that the Peruvian legal framework related to the protection of children and adolescents has changed in the past few years. Previous studies focus on understanding the school culture: they describe and analyse the process of building authority, the exercise of discipline and practices around power. The present research aims to go beyond the school's walls into the family and broader social spaces, to understand not only the school culture but also its relation to the social and cultural sphere, where discourses around discipline and the use of physical violence are also understood as a tool of control. The dialogue established between these discourses will help us develop a cultural understanding of the uses of violence in the resolution of conflicts.

### 3. The city of San Roman, the students and their families

San Roman city is located at an elevation of 4,000m above sea level in the region of Puno, in the Andes. It is located at a distance of 1,540.61km from Peru's capital, Lima, an hour and a half by plane. San Roman is the most populous province in the region of Puno (240,776 inhabitants) and has the greatest number of people living in poverty in the region (94,666) according to the National Statistical Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadística – INEI).<sup>7</sup> Because it is an urban settlement, there is electricity, piped water and sewage, as well as telephone and the internet. However, only a few streets are paved, while most are not; the city centre is mainly paved. There are several public and private primary and secondary schools in the city of San Roman, but most of the Young Lives qualitative sample of children attend public ones.

The province's main economic activity is commerce. In Puno Region, more than 220,000 of its inhabitants are employed in this activity. It has become a threshold and a hub for the circulation of goods. According to the 2008 National Census, Puno region boasts 37,663 business establishments, 67.1 per cent devoted to wholesale and retail businesses, 7.6 per cent to lodging and food services and 6.7 per cent to manufacturing industries. Out of the 37,663 establishments considered, 41 per cent are located in the province of San Roman (INEI 2009).

The families we visited and the children we talked to live in this context: ten out of the 12 families we worked with stated they worked in commerce. Four families declared they worked in informal trade, while the other six owned their own businesses, such as a textile store, a

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7 <http://www.inei.gob.pe>

tyre warehouse, or a stall in the market dedicated to informal commerce ('*ambulantes*'). Most of the trade takes place on the black market and implies tax evasion in the buying and selling of products; also drug smuggling is another important part of the informal trade thus creates networks of corruption and violence (Reynoso 2007).<sup>8</sup> The sons and daughters of parents involved in commerce are also fully immersed in trade, whether it be selling in the city's markets, helping out in the production of textiles, patching tyres, carrying materials around for the production of plaster. In other words, the lives of these boys and girls revolve around home, school and the family business, which can operate both at home and in the streets and markets.

This commercial city is inhabited not only by Spanish speakers, but also by members of the Andes' two most important indigenous groups: Quechua and Aymara people. Most of its population are of rural origin and maintain constant links with their places of birth. Throughout the region of Puno you can see that diversity; according to INEI,<sup>9</sup> 38.7 per cent of the population is Quechua, 25.9 per cent is Aymara and 35.4 per cent are Spanish-speaking.

On the other hand, San Roman city is a place where civic and patriotic values play an important role in the construction of identity. It is located in a region bordering Bolivia, a situation which explains the constant veneration of patriotic symbols, and also determines the heavy presence of police and military agents in the area. Every Sunday morning at 9am in the city's main square, the municipal government, along with the local army base<sup>10</sup>, puts on a weekly parade featuring state or private institutions that are celebrating anniversaries or significant events. Schools play an important part in these parades, many of them reasserting their prestige and identity through their performance.

The city is known not only because of its heavy commercial activity, but also because it presents most of the cases of lynching that occur in the Puno region. People who capture burglars or suspicious individuals prowling around their homes ask their neighbours for their help and, together, they tie the thief or suspect to a pole in order to beat him up, and thus punish him for the robbery, actual or attempted. Unfortunately, some of the victims die in this process, while others, being innocent but unable to prove it, are 'executed'.<sup>11</sup> 'Taking justice into their own hands' seems to be the dwellers' answer to the distrust their authorities inspire in them (and the lack of efficiency they see in them), because they cannot solve the problem of delinquency in the town. Most of the boys and their families with whom we could talk expressed their consent to this sort of public sanction, because of its effectiveness in intimidating anyone willing to become a burglar in the area. Three out of five children in the Young Lives sample said they had seen a public lynching in their neighbourhood. The feeling of insecurity in the area does not seem to be anything new; this was also reported during

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8 Reynoso (2007) recounts an incident that shows the extent of this problem: 'The assault on Túpac Amaru market on the night of 18 May left six people dead and at least 50 wounded, revealing the seriousness and severity smuggling has reached in the Puno region... According to the Customs House of Puno, in only the first few months of 2007 (January–April) there were 420 confiscations, which at cost price (selling prices doubles the sum) imply an amount of US\$936,849,48, in other words almost one million dollars. These significant numbers are evidence of the profitability of smuggling. For this reason, we have learned that this network of illegal commerce houses a power struggle in which different parties fight each other for the control of the market. The assault on Túpac Amaru shows the struggle of interests among San Roman families involved in all forms of commerce.'

9 <http://www.inei.gob.pe/>

10 Military service took place in that base.

11 On 5 September 2009 the young son of a public prosecutor was mistaken for a burglar, beaten up and burned alive. He was on vacation in San Roman after coming home from Russia, where he was a medical student (Fernández, 24 September 2009).

Round 1 of data gathering<sup>12</sup> for Young Lives in San Roman in 2002, where it was noted that 24.51 per cent of respondents in the province had been robbed or burgled in the last three years.

Another element worth taking into account is that in San Roman province, according to a regional representative of DEMUNA<sup>13</sup> (Defensoría Municipal del Niño y el Adolescente – Ombudsman Offices For Children In Municipalities), many cases of physical and psychological abuse occur within families. The situation is so common that it is seldom reported or only so when the case is extremely serious or when the abuse is constantly repeated. Between January and September 2009 alone, 517 cases of family violence were reported to the local CEMs implementing the National Programme against Family and Sexual Violence San Roman).<sup>14</sup> Thirty-three were cases of physical, psychological and sexual violence against boys and girls under 18; 266 cases were against individuals aged 18–35; 193 cases were against people between 36–59; and there were 25 cases of abuse against people aged 60 or older. In its preliminary results for the San Roman province, the 2003 Young Lives Peru survey<sup>15</sup> found that of 100 caregivers, 10.9 per cent said they were assaulted by their partner when the latter was intoxicated and 11.8 per cent of household respondents reported that one of the partners in the home got drunk at least once a week. Information along these lines was also provided by boys and girls during the the research done for this paper in 2009. In their opinion, family violence is a result of alcohol abuse and so is rarely reported. All the children we interviewed reported having heard or witnessed cases of domestic violence in their own families.

## 4. 'Battalion, good morning...': discipline in a secondary school

The present study was conducted in a public educational institution which has a notable characteristic: it is a Great School Unit (GSU), one of the schools created in the 1950s as part of the project for modernising Peruvian school education. GSUs are the product of the 'massification' of high-school education in the country and had the purpose of producing 'a true creole elite'; for this reason, many GSUs acquired great prestige and educated students who went on to play an important role in Peruvian political life (Benavides 1997). In contrast to other public schools and thanks to their prestige, the GSUs experience a high demand from the population. According to the testimonies we gathered, many parents wish to enrol their children in this GSU in the city San Roman, but there aren't enough places for everyone, making it a tough school to get into.

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12 Proyecto Niños del Milenio (2003).

13 Interview with the DEMUNA representative, October 15th 2009.

14 CEM stands for Centro de Emergencia Mujer ('Women's Emergency Centre'). Among their other functions, these government-run centres provide free specialised services for victims of domestic and sexual violence, including counseling, advocacy, legal advice and social assistance.

15 Young Lives internal document.

This particular secondary offers secondary education to approximately 3,500 enrolled students. Even though it is a school for boys and girls, it separates them into different sections. It has 145 teachers and approximately 45 classrooms.

When entering the GSU for the first time in 2007, I felt as if it was a huge school. However, the large numbers of students made it look smaller, especially when they were using the playground during break and at the end of the school day. At the start of the school day, the students line up in the playground, but during the breaks they run around playing and screaming. Several teams of students (once I noticed three) play football on the same field, using the same goalposts. The same is true for basketball. The students are used to sharing their space and can easily tell apart their teammates and rivals.

The observed secondary school caters for a large number of students. Students are educated in two shifts. In the morning shift, there are seven classes for every grade (school year), and there are about 45 pupils in each class. In the afternoon shift, there are also seven or eight classes, depending on the grade, with the same quantity of students in each. There are approximately 1,500–1,800 students per shift. The large number of students is one of the main variables at stake when reflecting on the issue of school discipline. There are eight assistants assigned to each shift (assistants are staff whose job is to maintain discipline and ensure compliance with rules)<sup>16</sup> and the ones we interviewed don't seem to cope with the work in such an oversized institution. In this context, discipline becomes a challenge for them.

*Assistant:* [In other schools] there are only 30 to 35 students in a class, no more than that, no more. Here we have 50, 49, 48 – that's too much.

*Interviewer:* A lot?

*Assistant:* A lot, a lot.

*Interviewer:* And that makes it difficult to maintain discipline?

*Assistant:* It's very, very difficult to control.

In the face of this issue, the institution resorts to strategies of control ranging from a gender-based separation of students to the use of physical exercise and physical punishment or beating, as we will see shortly.

Separating boys and girls is, for the headteacher, a strategy to maintain discipline that works because their behaviour varies: 'Boys have to be treated more roughly, while girls are more delicate and quiet. They cannot be disciplined in the same way.' According to the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2008), Save the Children conducted a survey in Peru during 2002 of 1,555 children and adolescents and 689 teachers, parents and other adults who work with children, and found that boys reported being punished more often than girls in school (23 per cent compared with 13 per cent). This gender-based separation ends up reproducing gender stereotypes that deny the presence of feminine traits in boys and justify the application of severe sanctions on the male student, who is thought of as '*fuerte y macho*' ('strong and macho'). (Callirgos, no date)

According to school regulations and teacher testimonies, the main correctional strategy used in the school is the '*llamado de atención*' (verbal warning), which prompts the students to reflect upon their own behaviour. In practice, verbal warnings happen all the time, both inside and outside the classroom, and they are not necessarily linked to dialogue. Most of the time,

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16 Their main tasks are: organising the brigadiers and school police (equivalent to prefects or senior students); supervising the lining-up in the playground; the follow-up of students and the control of lateness, absence and indiscipline; checking students' appearance and uniform, and helping them with family and educational problems.



we are talking about rough warnings, or shouting. This correction takes place when the students don't comply with the demands of the institution, which include being silent and obeying. This way, teachers and assistants put a limit on their students' actions and control them (Ames 1999). However, when interviewed the assistants said they did not believe in the effectiveness of the verbal warnings, there are not enough to discipline the students.

Now, well, How to correct the indiscipline? Because I remember well, in the past, using a whip [discipline was imparted]. So, as the Ministry of Education says, one cannot touch [the students], so we simply restrict ourselves to tell verbal warnings... That makes them listen to us but only a little bit. So far as to discipline is concerned, we can't. We suddenly find ourselves with no strategies at hand... [That is why] There is more indiscipline. (Assistant's Interview)

None of the assistants reported having been trained by the Ministry of Education or other entity in the exercise of school discipline after a ban on physical punishment as a means of correction, and it is in the lack of such training that they justify physical correction. Assistants attract students' attention, but not getting the results they expect from their students is what makes physical punishment 'justified'. This is significant because it clearly shows that the relationship between teacher and student or assistant and student is a vertical relationship, where the student must obey without questioning the order.

The main strategies of correction used in the school, according to fieldwork, are associated with punishment, often shouting and hitting. This takes place despite the fact that physical correction is banned according to the school's own regulations. That physical punishment is inflicted on a practical level but prohibited on a discursive level leads to the school becoming a daily transgression space where rules and coexistence are separated and not related. There was a group of about 15 male students in the playground. They were pupils who had come in late. The assistant appeared carrying a white wooden stick and shouted: 'One!' All the students assembled in four lines and became silent. Then the assistant repeated 'One!' and all the students straightened up. Immediately after the assistant screamed 'Two!', they took their feet apart and put their hands behind their backs, at ease. They were told to take distance and double distance.<sup>17</sup> The assistant marched around them, checking their positions and their uniforms. Then he started to instruct them to enter the classroom but one of the students, who got distracted because he was talking, didn't hear the instructions. The assistant shouted, 'What's happening over there?' and immediately came over and told the student to duck, which he did. The assistant then hit him (apparently not too hard) on the buttocks and again on the legs, using his stick. Then he told the child to stand back up and stay still, and he obeyed. Then he started commanding the students to move, one by one, into the classrooms. The student who had been hit was told to stay until the end of the process and the assistant stayed by his side (School yard observation).

As this incident shows, in this school as well as in other secondary schools, discipline is associated with a military system in which behaviour is controlled according to a hierarchical order. In many cases, discipline is imparted with the same harshness and strictness observed in military institutions (Benavides 1997). For this reason, discipline is ritualised. For instance, every morning before the school day starts, the students are required to assemble in lines in

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<sup>17</sup> These are military drill moves, adopted by some schools in Peru to help maintain order and instil obedience. 'Distance' means that each student must stand an arm's length from the student in front when standing in formation (in lines). Each student must lift one arm to create the correct distance between him/herself and the student in front. 'Double distance' means that students must lift both arms, horizontally, to create the correct distance between themselves and the students beside them.

front of the school authorities. Here, in the context of morning assembly, order is a strong requirement, stronger than in other school situations, since it is here that roles are consolidated. On these occasions, the student body formally greets the staff and, on Mondays, sings the school anthem and the national anthem, and the teachers make announcements. There are also prayers. It is the perfect framework to check the students' uniforms (as the regulations stipulate). In a context where order is required, the students must stand quietly and attentively.

In the school, morning assembly begins every day at 7:15. The bell rings telling students to come down to the playground and line up. On the fifth-floor balcony, which is in front of the headteacher's office, is the general brigadier,<sup>18</sup> from the fifth grade, calling everybody to the morning assembly. Using a microphone and an authoritarian tone of voice, he cries out: 'Let's form! Come on, come on, fourth-graders, form!', 'Where is the fourth-grade police? Get your students out, quick!' Once most of the students have been assembled by the brigadiers, the teacher in charge takes the microphone and addresses the students in the same tone used by the brigadier: 'Students, quick! You know time is man's worst enemy.' In the meantime the students get to the place where they have to be. Normally most students keep talking until they are specifically told to be quiet. Often they are threatened with staying out there for longer if they don't keep silent until the ceremony is over.

The teacher tells the students who are chatting: 'I'm not starting this until you shut up. You're staying there... this is almost like a market.' After this call to order, all the students are silent...

The brigadier will, in a firm and strong voice, greet them and tell them to stand to attention. Then the ceremony can begin.

*General brigadier:* 'Stand Still'. Get in position. Raise your right arm. Hey you, brigadiers [calls the brigadiers so they can get his orders get through to everyone]. Turn around... right.' The students answer in chorus: 'One, two, three' [while they count they are moving]. 'Get in line. You should barely touch your classmate's arm. Hey, why are there students walking? [He yells.] No one should walk in morning assembly time. The salute to the flag is sacred.' [His tone of voice is strong, emphatic.]

*Teacher:* Battalion, good morning! [He makes it sound like a command].

*Students':* Good morning [shouting].

*Teacher:* The students of today...

*Students:* ...are the same as yesterday [students finish the teacher sentence shouting].

*Another teacher:* There is no 'I can't'...

*Students:* ... for a student of [school's name] [students finish the teacher sentence shouting].

(School yard observation).

While ritualised discipline seeks to reaffirm the school identity (according to one teacher's opinion), it ends up reaffirming the hierarchical system of the school. In that sense, it seems that students are in the school only to receive academic and behavioural instructions and are not considered as an active part of the educational process. Patriotic civic practices that breed within the school reinforce authoritarianism and severity. The legacy of the military

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18 The General Brigadier is a fifth-grade student responsible for helping to maintain discipline, a sort of head prefect. Under his command are class brigadiers and school police, who maintain order in each particular class. The general brigadier, class brigadiers and school police must help the assistants in keeping the discipline of the institution.

practices in the school tends to values associated with rigid and compliant behaviour. The students are expected to act in unison. In 1905 the government of President Manuel Pardo y Barreda established 'pre-military education' in public schools<sup>19</sup>. There have been a series of legislative proposals calling for its repeal and some others for its reintroduction (Trinidad 2006). Students must obey the school staff and keep quiet while announcements are made (prizes, meetings, class suspensions, warnings addressed to classes that have been misbehaving, vocational workshops, etc.). They are supervised by class brigadiers and assistants. Sanctions for bad behaviour or incorrect uniform are commonly verbal, but sometimes they get physical:

The class brigadier pulls a student's hair and tells him that it shouldn't be there. He told the student that he must get a haircut because it was 'too long.' (School observation)

An assistant blows his whistle to impose silence. He pulls a group of students out of the line the morning assembly<sup>20</sup> because they were chatting and tells them to squat down 50 times. Then he makes them stay on the ground, squatting on their heels with their hands on their heads. If they lower their arms, they are told to get them back up and are hit (gently) with a stick. (School observation)

An assistant addresses a group of students: 'Tie your hair back, fix your uniform.' 'You are like small animals, all untidy,' he tells a group of girls. They don't say a word and immediately do what he tells them. (School observation)

It is therefore accurate to say that the individuals granted the authority, by the school by-laws, to maintain discipline, often impose their authority through shouting and hitting or other physical punishment. We are in the realm of a discourse in which physical and verbal violence represent a natural component of the negotiations taking place between agents in the school context.

Despite the fact that the sanctions used in this school address the need to subdue the student, this doesn't always occur. As Trinidad (2000) points out, the students often display their resistance in public, questioning and criticising authority, but they usually end up obeying the rules: not because they agree with them, but out of fear. For instance, they will not do what they are told immediately; most of them will only do so when they are left with no other alternative:

The assistant enters the classroom in order to deliver the control records.<sup>21</sup> The students approach him. He calls three of them and takes a pair of scissors out of his pocket. As soon as they see them, the students open their eyes wide and try to escape, but the assistant tells them not to move. A few of them protect their hair to prevent it being cut, but they are unable to stop the assistant. The rest of the students come nearer to see their classmates getting a haircut. They laugh at them and help the assistant to restrain them. The students whose hair is being cut feel obviously embarrassed and at the same time they act indifferently. (Class observation – class shift).

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19 Pre-military instruction aims to focus on discipline which encourages patriotism, respect for national heroes and civic values. It is used in Great School Units but also several public secondary schools in Peru.

20 In the morning assembly students of the secondary school we visited must stand still in lines, one behind the other.

21 The control record is a notebook that is used as a tool of communication between schools and parents. Students must write their homework or any important announcements in it. If the students misbehave, the teachers or assistants write it down in the control record. Students should bring the control record signed by their parents every day. It is similar to a homework diary.

Both through observation and conversations with students, we conclude that the main disciplinary strategies are: shouting, haircuts (boys are mostly the victims), physical exercise (push-ups, squats, staying in uncomfortable positions such as squatting on their heels for a long time, walking on their heels –'the little duck', running, etc.), blows with a ruler or a pen, and low grades in behaviour (which end up affecting course averages).

Verbal warnings and verbal aggressions are the most popular method. Students are publicly warned by name. This strategy is used for various reasons: lack of punctuality, untidiness or dirty uniforms, being silly or naughty, chatting, etc. Not only the teachers, but also the assistants and the students themselves employ it. The tone of voice used is normally emphatic; sometimes shouting using humiliating comments like the one mentioned before: 'You look like animals, all untidy'.

Most of the male teenagers we spoke to had been given a haircut for being found in internet booths wearing the school uniform, or because they had long hair (the school prescribes the short 'cadet' style). This punishment is performed in public during formation time. The assistant in charge trims the student's hair, leaving a section for the student to complete himself. It is fine for women to have long hair, but when their hair is long and loose they are told to comb it. Sometimes, when they consistently have an untidy appearance, the assistant himself combs it, ties it back or even tapes it up with sticky tape, according to a few students we interviewed.

Another popular form of punishment is physical exercise, which is usually used for lateness or missing classes (every one of the students we interviewed confessed to doing that). Again, according to the students, this sanction is public, performed on the playground in front of all the other students. The student being punished normally also gets a beating.

*Peter:* [about the assistant] He hits you, he shouts at you, he punishes you...

*Javier:* He doesn't like you to answer him...

*Peter:* ...he slaps you.

*Diego:* He doesn't like disorder in school.

*Interviewer:* Are you OK with his attitude?

*Diego:* No, but he starts hitting us.

*Javier:* He beats us with a stick.

*Question:* Where does he hit you?

*Javier:* On the foot.

*Sergio:* On the rear.

*Peter:* The thigh, the thigh.

*Dante:* The hand.

(Group work, male students)

*Interviewer:* ...OK. And the squatting happens only when you come late to class?

*Cecilia:* Sometimes we also get beatings.

*Dora:* With a huge stick, like this [imitates the whizz of a moving stick]. [Laughter]

*Interviewer:* Where, here? [points at her hand]

*Dora:* Yes, the hand.

(Group work, female students)

Just like the assistants, the teachers also discipline students, but they mostly do so by telling them off, giving them low grades, sending them out of class, pulling their hair and hitting them, as we mentioned earlier. These sanctions are related to class performance and behaviour during class time, while the assistants are in charge of the students' conduct outside class.

Discipline is imparted not only within the school's walls. When the municipal police (*'serenazgo'*) find a student in a video-game establishment, drinking beer or participating in a street fight, the student is immediately delivered back to school, where an assistant, the deputy head or the headteacher himself punishes the student both for their bad behaviour and for 'undermining the institution's prestige' by wearing the school uniform when engaging in such practices. This last aspect is very important. According to Benavides (1997), Great School Units are very fond of their prestige and very interested in maintaining it, for when they were first created their aim was to 'correct mediocrity and conformity, thus forming true non-discriminatory elites, imbued with a sharp sensitivity, a spirit of progress and strong convictions of sincerity and integrity' (Juan Mendoza, quoted by Benavides 1997: 4). Following the school's spirit, the student is expected to behave well both inside school and outside it, especially when wearing the distinctive uniform. The student is thus endowed with the responsibility of 'representing' his institution, of being an ambassador for its ethical standards; but only when wearing the uniform. In order to accomplish this, he or she must conform to the model of the 'well-behaved and studious pupil'. If the student doesn't comply, the school has the authority to correct them, even if they are out of school time. It seems, therefore, that the school is not a place that examines or engages with the reality these students belong to and face every day; on the contrary it is a space that denies that reality, and furthermore, recognises that reality as bad behaviour and therefore punishes it. The secondary school only punishes students; it does not try to understand why they misbehave.

The different sanctions I have mentioned are part of the students' daily life in this institution. Nevertheless, some of the sanctions are endorsed neither by the Ministry of Education nor by school regulations, which prescribe that 'no one should attack a student or harm his physical integrity'. In other words, daily experience redefines the application of written rules, within a space that espouses military values and attributes great importance to masculine traits associated with strength and violence. We can therefore conclude that Great School Units reproduce a strong identity discourse in their students, strengthen their world view from a particular perspective and, for that reason, restrict the possibilities of variation or heterogeneity (Broussett 2008).

Academic performance is highly valued, in all areas of study (though privileging maths and language). Good participation and behaviour in school events is also taken into account. Through public recognition the secondary school strengthens its own sense of identity and builds a school culture in which the highest ethical value is good behaviour (as defined by the visited school). These values are intended to produce students who are successful as a direct consequence of sacrifice, effort and abidance by norms (Callirgos 1995).

## 5. 'The beating ends... You get used to it': student voices about discipline strategies in their school

The students we interviewed commented more than once that they saw discipline as an important component of their lives. They understand discipline as a source of healthy behavioural strategies that could help them in their adult lives. Of course, this belief implies that future success in life is a consequence of good performance in school, something they learn at the school.

*Diego:* Yes, yes, it [discipline] will be useful, as the headteacher said...

*Javier:* Yes, because if you are undisciplined, nobody will ever employ you.

*Interviewer:* Why is that?

*Sergio:* Because you will be disorganised and you will trouble everyone else with your indiscipline.

*Diego:* If you get a C grade, you won't get a job. You will need an A to get one.  
(Group interview, male students).

The students indicate that, in their view, discipline means obedience. They believe discipline can help them get better jobs and a higher quality of life. In general, they believe discipline, taken as an abstract concept, is good for them because they are convinced it will transform them into law-abiding and respectful individuals. In their adult lives as employees, they will thus be recognised as such.

It seems that the school approach to discipline is intended to control student behaviour; discipline is not aimed at helping the students to understand why they behave in that way and to comprehend the meaning of the rules. From my point of view, the school's discipline is not only about changing behaviour or making children obey the rules (through fear); it also aims to get students to generate and internalise the rules and to regulate their own behaviour.

When I was discussing concrete disciplinary strategies with the students, their discourse changed and they no longer considered these to be so positive. Then they become critical of these strategies and tried to resist them because, even though the school required them to obey the rules, it never explained why the rules should be obeyed. In other words, these students learn that discipline is a fundamental component of adult life; nevertheless, this discourse puts behaviour before knowledge or the individual's capabilities to achieve his or her future well-being. It also speaks of a passive and not very critical concept of citizenship.

Neither boys nor girls agree with physical exercise as a punishment because it is painful and embarrassing. Both boys and girls indicate that when their hair is cut or when they are forced to perform physical exercises in public they feel *humiliated*. In the case of boys, haircuts are embarrassing for two reasons: first, because they are done in front of everyone else; and second, because the boys don't like the 'military look' (it betrays their personal sense of identity). Many times their classmates end up laughing at the victims of this disciplinary

strategy. Thus, the school uses exemplary public sanction to subdue the students, publicly reaffirming that teachers and assistants have control over students. These punishments are not only humiliating for them, sometimes they are also painful, even though they feel like they understand those punishments as a valid way of correction inside the school.

*Peter:* I don't like haircuts.

*Interviewer:* Is that what you hate the most?

*Peter:* Yes.

*Felipe:* My pigtail...

*Peter:* When they cut your hair in this school... They always prefer the 'cadet' style.

*Interviewer:* You all have to be 'cadets'..., why do you dislike getting a haircut?

*Felipe:* It looks ugly.

*Diego:* It's embarrassing... The others bother you, tease you, they rabbit-punch you.

*Felipe:* It's like being humiliated in front of everybody else.

(Group interview, male students)

*Carmen:* The [female] teacher sees them and says: 'Come here,' and they run away and she must have seen them; she finds out who they are and goes to the headteacher's office... 'I've seen them. They have run away. I've called to them, "Come here." They think I haven't seen them.' She grabs them like this [imitates teacher] and she pulls their hair... She had some sticky tape and *fla, fla, fla* [making noise of sticky tape being used to stick their hair back]; also she cuts their hair and the other girl's too, like this [imitating action] and... yes, later she [the girl] came in... I'd seen her with a fringe, but she [the teacher] cut it off *waj!* [making noise of haircutting] so she didn't have a fringe any more... .

*Interviewer:* What do you think of this way of correcting a student?

*Carmen:* It's OK, she was asking for it, her hair was all long. I don't know, the teacher always does that. We've all seen her.

(Individual interview with Carmen).

In most cases the students end up justifying the sanctions they receive for their bad behaviour. They understand sanction is an essential part of school dynamics. They also believe the use of force is a key tool when dealing with conflict, but they somehow question its application. In other words, despite the fact that the students find that punishment is the only legitimate instrument to improve their conduct, and though they agree with these specific methods of correction, they also question their effectiveness. The harshest critics are the boys: they state that beatings will not produce a positive effect because the victims 'get used' to violence. It is possible to infer that the students offer resistance to punishment with the purpose of stating that they also belong to the power network; that power does not belong only in the hands of the teachers. Facing punishment and enduring pain are ways of resisting without submitting. Moreover, in the long run, those students who are able to resist power obtain a degree of authority over their peers, a situation which reproduces a model of male authority associated with violence.

*Interviewer:* What do you think of being chased or hit with a stick? [SILENCE] Is it OK? Is it useful or not?

*Felipe:* It doesn't hurt.

*Interviewer:* It doesn't hurt, says Felipe.

*Javier:* It depends on who is hitting you.

*Interviewer:* For example?

*Sergio:* When they hit you on the hand [it hurts].

*Felipe:* When others get hit, they run. I stay there and take it, but it doesn't hurt.

*Peter:* Yes, right? Felipe always stay there, standing.

*Felipe:* You get used to it.

(Group interview, male students)

*Interviewer:* Do you think punishment is useful for you?

*Felipe:* No. In any case, we don't have to understand... We'll still misbehave.

(Individual interview, Felipe).

On the other hand, female students do feel that the sanctions they receive help to modify their behaviour. Fear of pain and aggression motivates them to be well-behaved. More so than boys, girls accept punishment as an adequate strategy. From my point of view, the girls' approval of physical punishment is related to the male and female ideals that are promoted within the school. The man / boy is clearly associated with a soldier who is compliant, strong and competitive, while the role of woman / girl is associated with tranquillity, cleanliness, beauty and submission. In that scenario girls develop differently than men. They cannot fight like them. If they do, they qualify as 'butch' women; therefore they find ways of rebelling that are not so obvious. Thus their main ways of transgressing are associated with not responding to the cultural pattern imposed by the school on girls, for example, not combing their hair as the school suggests, or painting their nails. Girls justify physical punishment by saying it means they will not behave badly again, which is related to the model of submissive femininity that is inculcated in the school, but the submission is not fully accepted by them as they respond through other strategies. Boys and girls interact in a space where force and coercion are legitimate strategies of negotiation in the relationships between students and teachers, and those among peers.

*Interviewer:* OK. Why do they hit you on the hands? Could you tell me?

*Carmen:* For being late, or out walking around during lessons.

*Interviewer:* And how do you feel about being hit on the hands or with a stick? What do you think?

*Elena:* I think it's all right.

*Interviewer:* Why?

*Dora:* Because if they didn't do it, nobody would respect the assistants. They only fear the assistants because of that. When an assistant comes near, they run away.

*Carmen:* And because you are afraid they will punish you, or make you do 'the little duck' [squatting] or push-ups, you won't be late next time.

(Group interview, girl students)

It is worth mentioning that girls receive less intense and less frequent physical punishment than boys. Such practices reinforce gender stereotypes according to which a man is perceived as a strong subject who can and should accept and endure pain during the growing up process. As we have seen, male students never show a submissive attitude when being physically punished; they rather strive to appear resilient and to hide pain. Performing like that allows them to appear more 'manly' among their classmates and stronger against authority. As Callirgos (no date) shows, the school system contributes to erasing feminine traits in male students during the teenage years.

*Interviewer:* Considering the different ways of correcting you we have discussed, which do you prefer? Having your grades lowered, being shouted at, having your hair cut: which do you prefer?

*Sergio:* I'd rather be hit with a stick.

*Diego:* I'd rather be shouted at, hit with a stick.



*Interviewer:* You'd rather be beaten with a stick than receive lower grades? Is that so?

*Diego:* Grades are sacred.

*Interviewer:* Is that right? Why is that?

*Javier:* The teacher gave him a minus eleven.

[LAUGHING]

*Sergio:* She took eleven points away from me.

*Interviewer:* Why do you prefer a beating instead of a low grade?

*Felipe:* It doesn't hurt.

*Felipe:* You get hit, then it goes away.

*Javier:* It's difficult to recover from a low grade.

(Group Interview, male students)

Even though they might not always agree with physical sanctions, they prefer them to seeing their grades drop. In their opinion pain is temporary and may be endured, while a low grade affects academic achievement and this is hard to recover from. A failing grade, a bad grade, is clearly the boundary that separates the students who are doing well from those who are not: those who might be successful in the future and those who won't be, or who will find it harder to succeed.

Both male and female students appear to think that sanctions must be justified by repeated acts of misbehaviour or by continual slacking. If the sanction is unexpected or sudden, then they consider it abusive: 'it's not all about beating us' (female student, fourth-grade). The sudden sanction is perceived as unfair by these students because it is not the contract tacitly established, in which the student must receive a warning before punishment. Behind this quote is a demand from students for a minimum of negotiation in the teacher–student relationship.

So far we may conclude that punishment is the cornerstone of the disciplinary system and therefore defines and determines social interaction in the school setting. But the disciplinary system also generates mechanisms of resistance among the students. They resist punishment through rebellion, confrontation or *aguante* (a form of resilience). Resistance represents, for students, a means of possible negotiation with the school authorities.

The disciplinary system of this secondary school is a hierarchical order in which the voice of the students is silenced. There are no paths of negotiation acknowledged officially by the school. If the students are caught misbehaving, they are punished: there is no way around it, and no dialogue about their motivation or the possible consequences of their actions. In school dynamics, transgression and resilience are tools that empower the student as a true agent. It is by using these tools that students establish a parallel or informal negotiation with the authority of their teachers. Transgression allows them to 'be different', to set themselves apart from their classmates and respond to coercion. The same is true for obedience, which sometimes represents for students an active and conscious choice that empowers them in their ability to negotiate. For example, some girls choose to obey not because they feel subdued, but because they believe that obedience in itself is a strategy that grants them more power of action at school. Through obedience, transgression and resilience the students stand up to the mechanisms of control.

*Interviewer:* Do they hit you? [*te saben pegar*]

*Felipe:* If you are walking, they hit you. I try to walk more slowly when they do that.

*Interviewer:* What does the assistant say?

*Felipe:* He gets tired and goes away.

*Interviewer:* You think that's better, waiting until he's tired so that then he won't keep hitting you?

*Felipe:* Yes. ...

*Interviewer:* OK, what would you rather be, a frightened student or one who can take a beating?

*Felipe:* One who can take it... that's cool.

(Individual interview with Felipe)

Students move within a system where socialisation is based on violence. For the students, transgression is perceived as an ability to excel in any group to be popular, and violent behaviour allows the students to avoid being dominated by their peer group. So, students learn that transgression is part of the environment and that there are certain ways to survive both physically and emotionally.

The students act according to this set of principles and this fact shapes peer interaction. The axiom seems to be that the strongest one, the most resilient, is also the most popular. Peer interaction reproduces the system of control that works at every level in this institution. The stronger subjugate the weak through physical aggression and sometimes verbal humiliation. Physical aggression can include practices such as *apanado* (aggression by a group) or *hacer poste* ('the pole') where several students carry another student, open his legs wide and run against a pole to hit his genitals.

*Interviewer:* Why do you beat up your classmates?

*Peter:* For revenge.

*Dante:* It's a joke...

*Peter:* Sometimes for fun.

*Interviewer:* Sometimes for fun?

*Javier:* When some of us are bored, we beat them up.

*Peter:* Beating, beating.

*Interviewer:* When is revenge needed?

*Felipe:* When somebody gets the rest punished...

*Sergio:* When one pays, everyone else pays. When it rains, we all get wet.

(Group interview, male students)

In a conversation that took place in the break, Peter told me: 'We have to beat up the cocky ones and the flatterers.' I asked him why he had hesitated before answering me, and he replied: 'It's like that. They tell on you like sissies [*'germas'* (women)].'

It seems that, in the view of male students, negative characteristics are always feminine. Traitors are punished for their femininity through brutal sanctions such as 'the pole'. At the same time the school and male students accept that force and aggression are legitimate strategies of negotiation that endow individuals with authority – a discourse according to which the feminine is associated and with passivity and subordination. The male students in the fourth grade of secondary education perceive that the members of class should operate in unison. Those who betray the group must be punished in various ways: beatings during break time, public insults, hiding their backpacks, pens, etc. The traitor who accuses one of his classmates of wrongdoing is punished by the stronger and tougher students in the class. The victims of punishment are expected to endure the pain and not seek outside help. The management of discipline in the school, as described here, allows a system of bullying, which can affect students' self esteem: the rough or aggressive peer games allowed in school and

relationships are seen as normal among teenagers and this opens the possibility of bullying.<sup>22</sup> In this way peer relations end up reproducing the authoritarian and masculine system of the school, where power relations are closely associated with control through physical strength. For this reason, fighting back against the explicit or implicit rules of the institution is a fundamental aspect of interaction.

## 6. 'Knowing how to get respect': the authority of teachers and assistants according to students

From the description we have so far, we may infer that the model of discipline imparted in this Great School Unit is similar to military protocol. Homogeneity of actors, order and obedience are highly appreciated; violence is the method employed to correct bad behaviour (Benavides 1994). This is not surprising, since these principles date back to the origin of Great School Units in the 1950s. The Department of Behaviour in Great School Units is traditionally guided by civic education, religious education and pre-military education, in order to 'guide and channel the conduct of the student, enforcing ethical, academic and hygienic norms, collaborating in the solution of their educational problems' (Warleta, no date: 85). Though time has passed and the Peruvian education system has changed – pre-military education has been eradicated, thus prioritising respect for the rights of children and adolescents – the truth is that there still exist some deeply-rooted practices that go back to the original model of behavioural correction, and to the local values and customs associated with physical punishment.

The strategies employed in the secondary school I visit in San Roman City still underscore the link between the representatives of power and authority, hierarchies and violence. Through several strategies of control, the school institution displays and symbolically reasserts its power to punish students (Benavides 1997). For this reason it is not a surprise to find, among them, the perception that the use of violence is justifiable as a natural tool when dealing with conflict.

The school institution grants this repressive authority to those agents that are mainly in charge of maintaining order: the teachers and assistants. An analysis of how the students perceive the authority of these two classes of agents will help us reflect on what strategies of problem solving are considered legitimate by the students.

In general, the students believe that 'authority' is a concept that rests mainly on a specific ability: the skill of 'getting respect from others'. This is related to the teacher's capacity to

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22 The results of a study by the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos in 2008 say that 47 per cent of children and adolescents are involved in school violence. The study conducted in four primary schools of Ayacucho, Cusco, Junín and Lima with a sample of 916 students also indicates that 65 per cent of parents are not interested in defending the victims and that about 25 per cent of teachers and parents do not react or protect victims, by allowing this process to continue. (Source: Radio Programas Del Peru (RPP) – <http://www.rpp.com.pe>.)

compel others to act according to his or her strategies of control. A good teacher is one who imposes discipline and makes students complete the necessary tasks, capturing their attention in a serious environment of peace and silence. Control exerted on the students' bodies (Foucault 2004) becomes a key element in the interaction between the pupil and the teacher because it is through physical control that the teacher centralises power and reinforces domination. This perception is also shared by the teachers themselves, for whom a 'good class' is always linked to 'quiet' and 'attention' (fourth-grade secondary school teacher of language, or 'integral communication').

'Respect' is the key feature in the understanding of authority. As long as school authorities (teachers, assistants, and the headteacher) are respected, they will believe that 'discipline' has been accomplished. For the students, respect for the teacher depends on two factors: the teacher's personality and the ways through which character is expressed (mainly, as we explained earlier, through intimidating physical violence and verbal sanction). Thus authority, respect and strength are related.

*Interviewer:* How do teachers get the respect they need?

*Carmen:* They shout at us, they shout loudly, they punish us. We can fool around, sometimes. We must be quiet during class time.

(Group work female students)

*Peter:* Some teachers are always obeyed.

*Interviewer:* Why is that?

*Peter:* The maths teacher because we understand each other, we always listen to him. We've had geometry since first grade... and the communication [language] teacher too. We obey him but because he's nasty.

*Interviewer:* What do you mean?

*Peter:* He's bad tempered...

*Interviewer:* What do these teachers do when you misbehave, for example?

*Peter:* They make you stand up in front of everyone and ridicule you.

*Interviewer:* For instance? Somebody who experienced this...

*Peter:* For example they call you to the board and ask you a really difficult question you cannot answer... 'You are stupid, so why are you fooling around?' they tell you.

(Interview with Peter)

The teacher's authority is not limited to controlling the students' bodies: the students also find it important that their teacher 'knows how to teach'. This implies having a good knowledge of the subject but also allowing room for freedom and relaxation within the classroom, because 'fun' (or '*chacota*')<sup>23</sup> is a good way to learn. In other words, even though we are talking about a hierarchical institution, it is also true that the students demand a certain degree of horizontality. For the students, this horizontality should also be controlled because, if it were permanent, it could become a threat to the teacher's authority, to this 'respect'. This indicates that the students grant more authority to those teachers who impose an authoritarian scheme but with certain traces of 'friendship' that suggest a more horizontal relationship. In a class observation, during the maths class, we noticed the students were paying attention and answered the questions the teacher asked them; the teacher encouraged them to participate, made some jokes but also punished bad behaviour or distraction by hitting them on the head with the board marker.

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23 Disorder in the class, movement of students, jokes, etc.

*Felipe:* The maths teacher is good.

*Interviewer:* Why?

*Felipe:* He makes you play, he makes you laugh, sometimes he dictates and you write down.

*Interviewer:* OK, but he never punishes you?

*Felipe:* Yes, he does.

*Interviewer:* How?

*Felipe:* When you don't do homework he gives you a 0.

*Interviewer:* What does he make you do? Squatting?

*Felipe:* No, he punishes us... With the stick...

*Interviewer:* And is that OK with you guys?

*Felipe:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* Yes? Why?

*Felipe:* Because many people get 0s... many lazy students...

(Interview with Felipe)

The students grudgingly accept the authority of teachers they consider 'too strict', but they do so while acknowledging that these teachers' authority rests only upon students' fear of sanction, and not the teacher's personality. In other words, these teachers are obeyed but not respected. It is worth noting that this type of relationship is the one that generates most resistance among the students. They don't accept the rules of the teacher and they are constantly looking for a way to transgress the order of the classroom, for instance taking advantage of the teacher's distraction to change places, make secret jokes and distract each other surreptitiously (Ames 1999). Some students, especially the boys, will openly confront the strict teacher through public defiance or resisting the pain caused by punishment. This is understood as a gesture of bravery by their peers. The final result is that the class becomes the focus of constant power struggles.

It's break time. I'm standing on the balcony and a few boys come up to chat with me. I ask them: 'Why doesn't your classroom have a door?' One of them answers: 'We've taken it out,' and laughs. 'And why did you do that?' I ask them, laughing too. Another student answers me: 'Teachers bug you a lot and they close the door leaving you outside.' Another student says: 'So that they won't leave us outside when we come in late.' He laughs. 'And who did it?' 'We all did it,' they all answer, laughing. (School observation)

Outside the classroom, the authority endowed by the institution with the power to maintain order is the assistant. The students acknowledge their authority and know that the assistants, unlike the teachers, can only 'gain respect' through punishment and by forcing them to behave correctly. However, this kind of authority strikes them as insufficient. Just as they do with the 'strict teachers', the students confront the assistants in a constant power struggle that involves transgressing rules, escaping their punishment or offering resistance. Discipline exerted by the assistants is exclusively linked to the control of the body. The assistant will strive to generate dutiful and perfectly uniformed students.

*Interviewer:* Why? Why is discipline useless?

*Peter:* I don't know, but I don't like it. ...standing up, respecting others, I hate that.

*Interviewer:* You hate it, you don't want to do it?

*Peter:* I don't... [Assistants] always hassle us... [they tell us] how to behave....

*Interviewer:* You believe the discipline you are being taught here is worthless?

*Peter:* No, it's useless, I'm still going to be naughty ['*chacotero*']

(Interview with Peter)

*Felipe:* At the end of the school year, the fifth-year students say goodbye to the assistant they hate the most.

*Interviewer:* How?

*Felipe:* They beat him up.

*Interviewer:* Do they?

*Felipe:* They leave his face, his eyes all bruised.

*Interviewer:* Do you want to do that when you finish fifth grade?

*Felipe:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* Why, don't you like the assistant?

*Felipe:* No.

*Interviewer:* What do you dislike the most?

*Felipe:* His nagging about my uniform.

(Interview with Felipe)

In their relationship with their teachers, the students demand trust but also authority. Unfortunately, the students in this Great School Unit believe authority can only be exerted by recurring to violence, either physical, verbal or symbolic.

In an area where there are constant transgressions, bribery among teachers and students is not unknown. The secondary school presents the following situation: in Peru, mostly in public education, the lack of educational materials makes the teacher print photocopies in order to have exercises or examples for teaching. Students and parents agree to pay for the photocopies because many cannot afford books and prefer to pay a small amount for photocopies each class instead. However, it seems that some teachers take advantage of this situation, charging the students excessive amounts of money (ranging from 50 cents to 2 nuevos soles, Peruvian currency) for giving them a new exam to complete at home or as they call it 'the chance' to boost their low grades. Such transactions are not allowed in the school, but teachers still sold the exam papers inside the school but being careful not to be seen. (These papers usually cost 100–200 per cent more than the price of normal photocopies.)<sup>24</sup> Most of the students we interviewed did not agree with this sort of transaction because they realised the teacher was forcing them to pay in order to pass the class; the fewer the revision notes they purchased from the teacher, the lower the grade they obtained and the lower their chances of avoiding failing. Some teachers use such strategies to reinforce their control over the students and strengthen a relationship of dominance and submission.

But, bribing is not a source of authority. Students don't respect the teachers who 'are always asking for money' or the '*coimero*' (corrupt). For the students, the corrupt teacher doesn't have the intention of educating the students because he or she is only concerned about the money. But students do respect the authority of the teachers who 'give you a chance' (those who sell them exams from time to time, when it is necessary: they consider this 'support'), because they show some concern for their grades, and for their achievement. In this scenario the concern of the school for the children's academic performance loses its meaning and is overshadowed by a single aspect: the grade. Through these practices the teacher abuses his/her authority and 'naturalises' corruption as a tool of negotiation.

As I see it, generalised corruption, just like physical punishment, ends up reducing the students' possibilities of action. It generates a vertical power relationship between teachers

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24 In public schools the lack of resources legitimises the charge for photocopies. Unfortunately, this also becomes a source of income for some teachers.

and students, in which the latter will often find themselves subjected to the will of the former. The teacher tends to often 'privilege' those students who can afford to pay for the new paper exam. Through these mechanisms the students whose families don't enjoy a good economic situation may feel under pressure and discriminated against, compared with those who are able to pay and therefore don't have to make an equally big effort to improve their grades.

*Carmen:* They don't explain it to you well enough... the topic. They dictate so that they can get it over with. The teachers don't explain well, others fail you because they feel like it or to force you to pay them.

*Interviewer:* Pay them?

*Carmen:* Aha.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever needed to pay a teacher?

*Carmen:* Yes, once, I didn't want to get an 11 [grade].

(Individual interview with Carmen)

*Cecilia:* Yes, the teacher says, he tell us: 'Have you got it or not [means the money]? To pass...', that's what he tells you... He's a real asshole, that old man... that's what we call him, we all call him 'the old man'.

*Interviewer:* He just asks you for it, he doesn't...?

*Cecilia:* He doesn't even give us the exam, but in the second... in the third bimester he gives us a low grade... A ten, and my classmate, well, checks her answers in the book. 'This exercise is correct, the old man says it's wrong....' I also checked my own exam and I saw I'd passed, but the teacher had given me a ten [failing grade in a 0–20 scale]. We complained and he didn't say anything. He just said, 'No, no, no.'

*Interviewer:* Until you pay him 1 *sol* for the another exam exam?

*Cecilia:* Yes... that teacher charges you.

(Individual interview with Cecilia)

However, bribes not only undermine the authority of the teachers but also endow the students with authority in the eyes of their classmates. Those students who know how to bribe gain popularity among their peers because they are able to pass effortlessly while misbehaving in class. Only a few students dare to get involved in such transactions, and for this reason they gain authority among the others. This is called as '*Viveza*' a word that is linked to bravery and understood as a key element in the formation of students' authority among their peers. As Callirgos (1995: 3) shows: 'in a school context, those who cannot handle such symbols as: "viveza", self confidence, control over situations, speak without regional accent, the correctly use of slang or the extensive use of bad words and nicknames, the aggressiveness, physical strength; wear fashionable clothing, not have ability in sports; and defiance to the authority; will always be in disadvantage in comparison to the ones that do manage them.' In other words, among peers there also exists a struggle for authority that employs violent strategies.

The school culture in which these students are immersed requires them to respond to social situations marked by violence and corruption. Knowing how to behave in that space empowers them before their peer group. The relationships take place in an environment where the rules are defined by personal relationships rather than within a framework of institutional arrangements. Violence, as well as bribery, reinforces a system where those who are stronger and those who have money are above those who aren't or don't.

As mentioned before, I consider that authority is not an attribute but rather a relationship between students and teachers or assistants. Students grant authority to those who recognise them as both listeners and speakers, although within a vertical relationship the teacher only punishes or has authority because of students' fear, but not their respect. This

implies that students do recognise an authority related to respect; this is a negotiation process among them and their teachers or assistants.

Physical punishment and verbal abuse, happening in a context where corruption is part of the school system, perpetuate the reproduction of violence, physical or symbolic, in the space of conflict resolution within the public school. The school seems to have become the perfect place for transgression and for disrespecting others.

## 7. 'In the end they'll be lynched by the class': the reproduction of local sanctions at school

However, the violence that the students face in school mirrors other forms of violence that they witness or experience in other social spaces, such as the family, the community and society at large. Social and cultural norms regarding authority, hierarchy, gender discrimination and discipline transcend the walls of the school.

As we mentioned earlier, in San Roman city informal trade is an important source of income for families, including the families of the boys and girls we interviewed. The fact that most commercial transactions are done on the black market generates networks of corruption which occasionally produce violent clashes between the traders and with the authorities. The parents of the children and the children themselves said they didn't trust their local authorities (police, mayor, etc.) much; they consider them corrupt and inefficient and doubt that they protect people's safety, in the midst of the high delinquency students perceive to exist in the city. They justify street lynching in their neighbourhoods because the police and the mayor don't act against criminals. They believe it is necessary to beat them up in order to teach them a lesson since the police and the mayor will not solve the problem. In a group conversation the children commented that it was common to see lynching in their neighbourhoods, and that not only burglars deserved such treatment but also men responsible for domestic violence. A few unfaithful women have also been victims of lynching.

The community imposes sanctions against what is incorrect and dangerous for the social order, like theft, infidelity and domestic violence. The paradoxical aspect of these sanctions is that they also make use of violence. The message this sort of 'justice' deploys is that of a threat channelled by public approval. Trying to reach justice by violating human rights is, therefore, a contradictory though frequent measure in rural areas of Peru, where *'rondas campesinas'*<sup>25</sup> beat livestock rustlers up and force them to perform physical exercises to punish them and correct their conduct.

Threat is part of daily life for students: when visiting their neighbourhoods and walking around the school, we could see violent graffiti on the walls which threatened people with

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<sup>25</sup> Peasants' patrols in rural Peru.



lynching or having bricks thrown at their heads if they urinated in the street or dropped litter on the roads, to cite some graphic examples:

'Do not urinate: penalty, massacre' (written on a back wall of the school).

'Don't drop litter or you'll get a brick in the head' (written on the wall of a local hospital).

'It is forbidden to urinate and/or drop litter under penalty of lynching' (neighbourhood close to the school).

The context where these boys and girls live and study legitimises the use of physical violence in correcting behaviour, instructing the population and setting the boundary between what is allowed and what is not. The discourse of lynching follows the same logic of the physical punishment going on in schools: the aim is to teach a lesson and change a conduct.

*Diego:* Killing people is wrong.

*Interviewer:* And lynching them?

*Peter:* Maybe a little whipping will do.

*Interviewer:* You share his opinion?

*Javier:* Yes, I'd beat him up, but not kill him.

*Felipe:* Almost kill him.

*Peter:* Leave him agonising.

(Group interview with male students)

*Interviewer:* OK. What do you think about this? Why are things solved this way?

*Carmen:* Because they don't understand.

*Dora:* To make them learn.

[LAUGHING]

*Elena:* Because when you do nothing to them... I mean, because when a burglar breaks into your home, many neighbours take him to the police and nothing happens. I don't know, he pays and gets out and that's it. Then they do it again.

(Group interview with female students)

The students' discourse reproduces a culture of fear that restricts the actions of individuals, appealing to fear and sanction. It is very difficult to find, in this discourse, ways of solving conflict that do not appeal to violence or physical strength.

On a few occasions we noticed that, when talking about the punishment they received at school, boys and girls referred to it as 'lynching'. Once a boy told me: 'There goes the assistant, he's going to lynch them in the class [hit them hard]'. When I asked him what he meant, he mimicked the gesture of hitting someone with a stick, and laughed. This scene helps us understand that, for students, the ways in which conflict is resolved both in and out of school complement each other and reproduce the same discourse, according to which violence can legitimately be used to correct incorrect behaviour.

The school does little to prevent this when using such disciplinary methods as cutting students' hair, hitting them and forcing them to do physical exercise or stay in uncomfortable positions. Those students who don't satisfy the school's expectations are treated much like lynched thieves, with public sanction an exemplary spectacle for other students. The forms of correction at school are also part of the cultural system of sanctions in the city of San Roman, though the students are not punished as severely as the burglars and criminals.

In a conversation I had with Felipe's mother, she told me she once visited the school to ask why her son's hair had been cut. He had got home feeling upset and with a bald patch on his scalp: 'They cut it so short. Is my son a burglar?' She then told me that she wanted to

complain but her son wouldn't let her. She asked him what he'd done, he said 'nothing' and she got upset because she thought he had been unfairly punished, and insisted on going to talk with the assistant. Felipe told his mother not to because he had been found playing video games while wearing his school uniform. She got angry and said that then it was OK that his hair had been cut for a good reason: 'He shouldn't play those games, the haircut was OK...' "Why did you do that?" I asked him.' (Observation at home, Felipe's house)

However, as for the lynching among students, it is not understood as a correction tool but accepted as an entertainment and daily socialisation strategy in school. As mentioned, the relationship between peers occurs in the context of competition and relations of dominance and submission, which are demonstrated in front of others who are stronger. More transgression and control over others implies more prestige and power. The control system that prevails in the school corresponds to the control system which students apply with their peers: the commanders versus the ones who obey.

On the other hand, caregivers expect that harsher discipline is enforced at school and demand that school norms are obeyed, since they perceive that a 'strong hand' is required in order to prevent the children from joining gangs. Parents think that the company of these 'bad friends' could steer their sons and daughters away from the project they envisage for them: progress. For this reason they expect the Great School Unit to grow stricter and to respond to that ethical principle, mentioned by Callirgos (1995), of producing quiet, obedient and studious pupils. Parents agree with haircutting and consider that physical exercise is acceptable. Three mothers out of the five Young Lives families interviewed said that, if the student did not respond to words, then he or she should be hit. We can therefore see that the parents entrust the teachers with authority and demand they reach the target of educating their children as 'correct' individuals, something which implies leaving the children's voices out of the picture.

In this social space, children and adolescents seem to be at the bottom of a hierarchical society where they are considered to be subjects who must be educated according to the laws of the adult world. School parades, which are frequent in this town, follow the same logic: students must form together a homogeneous mass that conforms to discipline, bodily control and perfection. They are agents in a process of growth who have to obey, both at school and in the community, a set of rules related to order, obedience and passivity. Children and teenagers are considered as beings deprived of autonomy, who should be shaped and moulded by adults.

## 8. Discussion

This paper shows that physical and verbal violence are part of negotiations between agents, understood as 'natural components' of social relations at the secondary school in San Roman City. Discipline and its application determine the daily lives of students in relation to their teachers and assistants, in a space that places a high value on military instruction and the masculine values associated with physical strength. Following this path we reach the conclusion that the school applies and strengthens a discourse of 'horror of difference' (Callirgos 1995), in which the aim is the suppression of the heterogeneity demanded by the students.

By analysing student perceptions we found that students considered discipline as positive in their lives because it would help them become obedient individuals who respected others. In other words, discipline was, in the view of the students, a key component in their adult well-

being. The students don't expect to live in an anarchic world – they demand rules and organisation, but don't want that to be an imposed or forced organisation that ends up contradicting itself. Students want discipline in their lives, and thus they respond to the disciplinary system where they find themselves.

Students internalise the constant surveillance as a necessary strategy in the development of discipline: being a 'correct' person implies violence, and correction through physical punishment. There is a search for order and well-being that considers constant surveillance and physical punishment as the only possible strategies of attaining these.

In a state of affairs where the school worries about order and obedience, and imposes constant sanctions on students, they consistently ask themselves why they should obey the rules. Obeying the rules steers them away from learning 'viveza', which seems to offer a more encouraging discourse than the official one (Callirgos 1995). In a setting where most students wonder whether they'll be able to move on to university once they finish school, because of the economic situation of their families, the discourse of effort, sacrifice and progress sees its strength diminished, especially given that these students are exposed to corruption, illegality and smuggling, which are often sources of money and success.

The fact that students become used to the punishment, that they prefer to be beaten than have their grades lowered, shows the excessive value placed by the school on traditional academic achievement at the expense of other aspects of education, such as participation or skills. Besides, accepting violence as a valid strategy of sanction helps to reproduce a system in which relationships are unequal and hierarchical, between the dominant and the dominated.

Disciplinary strategies used in the school reinforce the link between power and authority on the one hand, and verticality and the use of strength on the other. Through an array of control strategies, the institution symbolically displays and reaffirms its power to discipline and punish. Additionally, these strategies end up inscribing gender stereotypes that replicate a discourse of masculinity linked to force. Furthermore, it is important to note that when students understand violence as a natural strategy in social relations, they use it and reproduce it to gain authority among their peers. This is a perfect path toward the bullying and harassment of those considered weak or different. The fact the observed school sees discipline as a punitive system denies the possibility of dialogue and student participation, and so the school is perceived as a space within which one should not recognise conflict; therefore the relation between those who dominate and those who are dominated prevails. It seems that this secondary school is not a space of coexistence, but rather a repressive training space that does not face up to the social context in which it is immersed.

As we mentioned in the introduction, the Peruvian State has taken huge steps forward in the legal protection of minors; nevertheless, theory and practice differ. Even though there is legislation that prohibits child abuse and physical punishment in schools, violence finds justification in the view of the very same parents, teachers and assistants, who blame the limitations of the system. The large numbers of students and the lack of training for teachers and assistants work as green lights for the application of the disciplinary strategies discussed here. Just as the international NGO Plan explains, the reproduction of violence happens mostly in countries where teachers are poorly trained and lack motivation. As a result of this, they generally appeal to punitive methods that are physically violent (Plan 2005).

The constant reproduction of the disciplinary discourse is also related to the authoritarian culture of Peruvian public schools. Unfortunately in the recent past these schools, according to the Commission for the Truth and Reconciliation (CVR) report, were fertile ground for the

growth and propagation of the Peruvian Communist Party-Shining Path (PCP-SL), the main actor to blame for political violence in Peru:

The constant variable that runs through history is a vertical, authoritarian style, in which power is negotiated through physical violence and is written on the body. The PCP-SL is thus inscribed in an old tradition that dates back to physical punishment in plantations and military outposts and raids, in communities, even in the well-known adage 'spare the rod and spoil the child' [it is more bloody in Spanish: 'la letra con sangre entra']. (CVR – Volume VIII: 18).

For all the reasons stated in this paper, I believe it is necessary to modify Peru's educational culture in order to transform the Peruvian school into an institution that acknowledges difference. As Sandoval (2004) points out, institutions such as public schools are based on homogenising paradigms that, when taken to an extreme, express discrimination, racism and contempt, usually concealed under a paternalistic mask. Humiliating physical pain is encouraged by constructed social representations, both in school and in the community, that portray the child as a being who must be tamed through violence, through timely and well-dosed physical punishment. In this regard we ask, for this secondary school case study, to what extent the school can avoid the social and cultural discourse in relation to the use of corporal punishment as an educational tool? It certainly should, but it is also true that the context in which it is located makes this extremely complex. To begin with, it is important that the school ceases to act as a correctional institution without dialoguing with its students. In this sense, the school could begin to establish a system of flexible rules in order to collect the voice of students. I also think it is important that the school recognises itself as being a place where there are violent relationships and corruption, otherwise it just contributes to reproducing the tolerance towards and complicity with such attitudes.

The fact that the students prefer being beaten to receiving a low grade shows that academic success is linked to performance and sacrifice, but it also underscores the inefficiency of beating students as a method of correction. Pain passes by, while all the rest stays untouched.

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**Young Lives is an innovative long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty.**

The project seeks to:

- improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and to examine how policies affect children's well-being
- inform the development and implementation of future policies and practices that will reduce childhood poverty.

Young Lives is tracking the development of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam through quantitative and qualitative research over a 15-year period.

## Young Lives Partners

Young Lives is coordinated by a small team based at the University of Oxford, led by Jo Boyden.

Ethiopian Development Research Institute,  
Ethiopia

Centre for Economic and Social Sciences,  
Andhra Pradesh, India

Save the Children – Bal Raksha Bharat, India

Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam  
(Women's University), Andhra Pradesh, India

Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo  
(Group for the Analysis of Development), Peru

Instituto de Investigación Nutricional  
(Institute for Nutritional Research), Peru

Centre for Analysis and Forecast,  
Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences,  
Vietnam

General Statistics Office, Vietnam

Save the Children, Vietnam

The Institute of Education, University of  
London, UK

Child and Youth Studies Group (CREET),  
The Open University, UK

Department of International Development,  
University of Oxford, UK

Save the Children UK  
(staff in the Policy Department in London  
and programme staff in Ethiopia).



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An International Study of Childhood Poverty

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