Restorative Approaches to reducing school exclusion

Dr Gillean McCluskey
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1. What does research tell us about Restorative Approaches in school?

2. What are the challenges for RA in the context of changing times?

3. How can we set priorities that help reduce exclusion?

4. How can we measure success in this?
What does research tell us about Restorative Approaches in education?
restorative practices in three scottish councils
Evaluation of pilot projects 2004-2006
Executive Summary

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN THREE SCOTTISH COUNCILS
A COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION FUNDED BY THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Gwynedd Lloyd, Gillean McCluskey, Joan Stead
University of Edinburgh
Sheila Riddell, Elisabet Weedon, Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity,
University of Edinburgh
Jean Kane, University of Glasgow

July 2007
An evaluation of Bristol RAiS

Layla Skinns, Natasha Du Rose and Mike Hough
ICPR, King’s College London
26 February 2009
Findings: Achievements of schools

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<tr>
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<th>Primary and Special</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
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<td>Significant achievement across school</td>
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What is restorative justice?

Restorative justice can be defined by its fundamental principle, namely that when one person has harmed another, the most useful response is to try to repair the harm done. The restorative justice approach redefines crime primarily as harm or injury rather than law-breaking.

Why use restorative justice in schools?

Restorative justice in schools aims to reduce bullying and victimisation, manage conflict and improve attendance in schools; research evidence supports restorative justice in schools as a particularly promising approach to improving behaviour and attendance.

(from RJ in Schools home page)
Fostering positive social principles in a school community of mutual engagement

Responsibility and accountability for one’s own actions and their impact on others

Respecting other people, their views and feelings

Fairness
Commitment to equitable process

Active involvement of everyone in school with decisions about their own lives

Issues of conflict and difficulty retained by participants, rather than behaviour pathologised

Willingness to create opportunities for reflective change in students and staff
Self-determination
Mutual respect
Trust
Openness
Empowerment
Connectedness
Tolerance
Acceptance that mistakes happen
Encouragement
Acknowledgement
Acceptance of diversity
Hospitality

Restorative Values
Findings: RA works best when...

- Seen as framework of values, practices and skills
- A whole school approach
- Supported by high quality staff training
- School leaders model the way
- **Disciplinary procedures compatible with RA**
- Schools and communities make it their own
What are the challenges for RA in changing times?
What are the key issues for schools?

- Aspirations
- Attitudes
- Behaviour
- Changing landscape of education
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Intersections of key inequalities

- Special needs
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Poverty
Who gets excluded?

- Mental health difficulties
- Physical and/or learning difficulties
- Substance misuse
- Domestic abuse
- Financial stress

- No parent in work
- Teenage parenthood
- Poor basic skills
- Living in poor housing
- ‘Looked after’
Exclusion: the issues

- Rates of permanent exclusion are decreasing but...
- Illegal exclusion still happening
- Reasons given for exclusion problematic
- Some children missing
- Lack of focus on reintegration
- Some groups excluded more than others
- Parents often see exclusion process as unfair and complex
- Poor educational outcomes
Education other than at School

- Reintegration rates improving
- Nearly 90% of learners have special needs
- Nearly 70% are entitled to free school meals
- 75% of learners are male
- Provision is variable e.g. curriculum quality, breadth, hours per week, opportunities for success, accommodation and resources
- Most learners and families are happy with their placement
- Poor educational outcomes
How can we set priorities that will help reduce exclusion?
Should we identify priorities and if so how?

- Leadership modelling?
- Student participation?
- Parent participation?
- Support staff?
In general, the disproportionate identification of boys is greatest in high incidence, non-normative categories, where professional judgement plays a large part in deciding which children should be categorised in this way.
• What might look like ‘low aspirations’ may often be high aspirations that have been eroded by negative experience

• What might look like ‘parental disengagement’ may actually be the result of a high level of commitment to their child’s education, which is not matched by the capacity to provide effective support or...

• by the ability of schools to work effectively with parents

• BUT helping poorer parents to believe in their own actions and efforts can lead to improved outcomes
Working WITH school staff

RA works best when:

- head teachers ‘walk the talk’
- All staff in the school community are trained
- When school leadership teams use it in their daily interactions with staff
- When those leadership teams use it in dealing with staff difficulties
- ? When staff use it in their partnership working
Children report that their views are not sought, listened to or acted upon consistently.

There is good evidence of the negative outcomes for children that emerge when they are unable to have their voices heard.

Only a minority of School Councils have been involved in making ‘important’ decisions

What might look like ‘low aspirations’ may often be high aspirations that have been eroded by negative experience

BUT increased student participation can lead to improved outcomes
How can we measure success in using Restorative Approaches in education?
Measuring success?

‘The rightness or wrongness of an intervention is not simply a question of whether or not it works’

Is X effective in changing behaviour?

Or

Is X the right thing to do on ethical grounds?

Are there calls for evidence-based practice... only when considering non-punitive interventions?
Methods for measuring?

- analysis of publicly available administrative data
- interviews with ‘key informants’
- survey e.g. of local schools, staff, parents..
- interviews e.g. with children and young people, their families and a range of professionals working to support them in education settings outside mainstream schools
What does success look like?
What people think it looks like

What it really looks like
Using the tools you already have?

- What counts as evidence?
- **Data:** What do you already have to collect data about?
- How could you use it differently?
- **Support:** whose advice do you already call on?
- How can you use all this to build up a better picture of **patterns and trends** in your setting?
- What else do you need?
Conclusions

- RA can be helpful.
- It can work well to reduce exclusion.
- It is possible to measure success but...need to think carefully about what success means in your own setting and context.


McCluskey, G. (in press) Trying to measure ‘what counts’ Critical Studies in Education Special Issue: Exclusion, alternative education and social justice in schooling

McCluskey, G. (2014), ‘Youth is present only when its presence is a problem’ voices of young people on discipline in school. Children & Society, 28:2, 93-103


Pirrie, A., Macleod, G., Cullen, M.A. and McCluskey, G (2009) Where next for pupils excluded from special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUS)? Final Report to the DCSF.
What happened?
What were you thinking at the time?
What have you thought about since?
Who has been affected by what you did?
In what way?
What do you think you need to do to make things right?
Defining a Restorative Approach?

Restoring good relationships when there has been conflict or harm, and developing an ethos, policies and procedures to reduce the possibility of such conflict and harm arising;
Restorative Approaches in action

- Restorative conversations
- Restorative language & scripts
- Mediation
- Restorative values, skills and practices
- Circles [checking in & problem-solving]
- Restorative ethos building
- Restorative conferences
- Curriculum focus on relationships/conflict resolution
Findings:
Strengths and achievements in schools

- Strong focus on ethos and relationships in and out of classroom
- Broad view of RA underpinning practice
- Regular training for all staff and students
- Reduction in disciplinary incidents
- Reduction in onward referral
- Clear evidence of students developing conflict resolution skills
- Strong modelling by school leadership team
Methods

- Interviews with a range of LA and school staff
- Interviews, individual and group, with pupils
- School staff survey (627 responses)
- Pupil survey (1163)
- Observation of a range of meetings, activities and lessons
- Documentary analysis of school and LA policies
- Participation in a range of Scottish Executive, LA and school based meetings
- Analysis of national and school statistical data
- Focus group meetings with school and LA staff
**Staff Survey**

The survey of all staff (teaching and non-teaching) in the 18 schools was undertaken in 2005. A total of 1397 questionnaires were distributed to the schools. Of these 627 were returned, which represents an overall response rate of 45%. The response rates for the different types of schools differed with primary schools having an overall rate of 56% and secondary schools 42%. There are, of course, limits to any generalisations that can be made on the basis of this data due to the response rate and the fact that the survey was carried out early in the pilot. The findings, discussed in Chapter 6, do however offer a 'snapshot' of staff attitudes to, and understandings of, Restorative Practices.

**Pupil Survey**

Similarly, a pupil survey of all 18 schools was carried out in 2005, aimed at pupils in P5 and P7 in primary school and S2 and S4 in secondary school. The questionnaire complements the staff questionnaire and also allows for triangulation with the qualitative data gathered through observation, interviews and focus group meetings. The total number of questionnaires returned was 1163. Again though, there are limits to the generalisations that can be drawn, as the survey was undertaken at an early stage of the implementation of Restorative Practices in some schools. The findings, discussed in Chapter 6 offer an interesting picture of pupils' views.