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Restorative approaches in schools: current practices, future directions

Gillean McCluskey

Introduction

Research suggests that restorative approaches in schools can challenge and change troubled and troublesome behaviour and also improve school climate overall (Drewery 2014, Gregory et. al 2014, McCluskey et al. 2014, Vaandering 2013, Skinns et. al. 2009, McCluskey and Lloyd 2009, Kane et al. 2008, APA 2008). This chapter outlines the key definitions and elements of a restorative approach to relationships and behaviour in education, tracing its origins in restorative justice. First, it presents a review of research undertaken by the authors and others, primarily in the U.K., but also draws on recent and current developments in the U.S.A., Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The chapter then examines key themes in school-based restorative strategy and practices, the use of restorative language, and engagement with young people, parents and community. From there, it moves on to discuss the key questions for school security, surveillance and punishment raised by restorative approaches, before pointing finally to the importance of the emerging focus on a new, more critically focused understanding of restorative approaches.

Defining Restorative Justice

Most writers agree that restorative approaches (RA) in education owe a significant debt to indigenous or pre-colonial systems of conflict resolution and the subsequent emergence of restorative justice (RJ) in criminal and juvenile justice systems internationally (Fronius et al. 2016; Sellman, et al 2014; Vaandering 2010; McCluskey et al. 2008; Braithwaite 2004).

The UN defines restorative justice as,

a problem-solving approach to crime that focuses on restoration or repairing the harm done by the crime and criminal to the extent possible, and involves the victim(s), offender(s) and the community in an active relationship with statutory agencies in developing a resolution (United Nations 2003, 28).

This definition draws attention to the distinctive features of RJ; its positioning of crime as a problem to be solved rather than simply contained; the need to involve all affected by the crime including the victim and the emphasis on ‘information, truth telling, empowerment and restitution’ (Zehr with Gohar 2003, 13) rather than retribution. As such, it contrasts sharply with conventional principles of criminal justice which hold to the importance of the State as neutral protector and arbiter. John Braithwaite perhaps summarises the views of many RJ supporters when he suggests that ‘Restorative justice restores victims, restores perpetrators and restores communities. It is about the idea that because crime hurts, justice should heal’ (2004), a view shared by O’Connell, an Australian police officer, in suggesting a need to focus on ‘what happened, what harm has resulted, what needs to happen to make things right?’ (2004).

The New York Restorative Justice Initiative has recently offered a more extended definition,

‘Restorative justice is a theory of justice that can be employed both re-actively, in response to conflict and/or crime, and proactively to strengthen community by fostering communication and empathy. Restorative Justice invites everyone impacted by a conflict and/or crime to develop a shared understanding of both the root causes and the effects. Restorative Justice seeks to address the needs of those who have been harmed, while encouraging those who have caused harm to take responsibility. Restorative Justice emphasizes the capacity of all people for healing, growth, and transformation and in this way it encourages accountability, self-determination, healing, and interconnection. Restorative Justice has a range of applications within communities, schools, and the justice system. It may also be used to address mass social conflict and/or injustice’ <http://www.restorativejustice.nyc>

This definition argues the need for commitment to principles of reparation and repair, and that there is more to be gained for individuals and communities by repairing the harm caused by an offence, and building better relationships, than by penalising or ostracising those who have caused harm or conflict. It is these principles which have resonated so strongly with some in education (Hopkins 2016, Morrison 2015, Thorsborne and Blood, 2013, Hendry 2009, Amstutz and Mullet. 2005), seeking an alternative to punishment and an effective response to rising levels of school indiscipline and expulsion/exclusion. In Scotland, for example, the Government initially funded a two-year pilot project and simultaneously commissioned an evaluation, which was undertaken jointly by the authors and colleagues at Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities. The evaluation examined the ways in which 18 schools (10 primary, seven secondary and one special school) were developing RA (Kane et al. 2008). The success of the pilot and its follow up (Lloyd and McCluskey 2009) led to the introduction of country-wide Government level policy support and training for RA; a commitment that is now firmly established, and which in turn has led to increased teacher confidence in dealing

with challenging situations and building and sustaining positive behaviour and relationships in schools (Black et al. 2017, Black et al. 2012).

Defining and Conceptualising Restorative Approaches in Education

Restorative approaches in an educational context can be defined as:

‘restoring good relationships when there has been conflict or harm, and developing school ethos, policies and procedures to reduce the possibility of such conflict and harm arising’.

This widely used definition was developed in collaboration with schools and education authority staff in the national research undertaken in Scotland by the authors (McCluskey et al. 2008, 405).

The terms ‘Restorative Justice’, ‘Restorative Justice Practices’, ‘Restorative Practices’ and ‘Restorative Approaches’ are all in common usage and appear in the literature, as will be evident in this chapter. However, the term *restorative approaches* has now gained wider acceptance internationally, encompassing not only the practices but also the underlying philosophy, values, skills and strategies associated with RA, and therefore this term is preferred here. Our research suggests that the concept of restorative approaches can offer a broader and more relevant focus for thinking about cultures and conflict, about change and about schools as learning communities. It enables RA to move beyond being considered as a mere ‘practice’ or ‘another tool in the toolbox’.

The underpinning principles of restorative approaches in education emphasise the importance of:

- . fostering positive social relationships in a school community of mutual engagement
- . taking responsibility

- . accountability for one's own actions and their impact on others
- . respecting other people, their views and feelings
- . empathy with the feelings of others
- . fairness
- . commitment to equitable process
- . active involvement of everyone in school in making decisions about their own lives
- . issues of conflict and difficulty being retained by the participants, rather than the behaviour pathologised, and
- . willingness to create opportunities for reflective change in students and staff.

These principles are based on the findings of the Scottish studies referred to earlier (Lloyd and McCluskey 2009, Kane et. al 2008), developed in direct consultation with school principals, teachers and students. Advocates of RA have often adapted such principles to reflect their own particular contexts and priorities but the underlying tenets remain the same (Fronius et al. 2016, Guckenburg et al. 2016).

Taking a restorative approach into the school community

A restorative approach employs a variety of strategies and practices. These include, but are not limited to: relational pedagogy training for teachers, restorative ethos building, a curriculum focus on relationships/conflict prevention, classroom management initiatives, emotional and social literacy skills, anger/conflict management, playground friendship projects (sometimes known as 'playground pals'), use of restorative language and scripts, 'buddy' schemes, circle time, mediation and peer mediation, solution focused interventions, informal restorative conversations (sometimes known as

‘corridor conversations’), restorative group work with students and/or families, individual counselling, person centred planning and formal restorative conferences. This list reveals that RA is not an entirely new concept. Prior to the introduction of RA in the U.K. in the early 2000s, many schools in the U.K. and internationally already offered a range of supportive practices and our research has shown that often the best practices (e.g. circle time, groupwork, peer mediation) include some that were either compatible with, or have become part of their restorative approach overall (Kane et al. 2008, Lloyd and McCluskey 2009). Not all of the aspects outlined above are to be found in every school. Indeed, research indicates that there is very considerable variation across jurisdiction, at education authority level and within schools themselves (see for example Drewery 2014, Losen (ed.) 2014, Campbell et al. 2013, McCluskey et al. 2011) and as Hurley et al. (2015) note, there is as yet no robust research which clearly identifies which of these aspects are the most crucial. However, for many school communities, RA offers a uniquely coherent framework within which relational values, principles and actions are experienced as internally congruent and effective (Wadhwa 2016, Riestenberg 2012, Morrison 2007) .

There are also a range of different theoretical underpinnings to RA, some of which have features in common with other approaches to supporting children and young people in school. In the U.K., these include humanistic, person-centered psychology, cognitive-behavioural approaches, the social model of inclusion and sociological perspectives on social and educational processes that recognize conflicting purposes of schooling. Instead of thinking of a school as simply a collection of individuals striving to achieve their personal best, RA foregrounds the notion of school as community, whose every part or member is necessary (see for example, Amstutz and Mullet

al.2005). It aligns with a view that the person is not the problem; the problem is the problem, as developed by White and Epstein in their early work on narrative therapy (1990).

Restorative approaches recognise the human wish to feel safe, to belong, to be respected and to understand and have positive relationships with others. Some writers (see for example, Armstrong 2006) see trouble in school as a sign of the organism or body being ill and the person who causes trouble as the site where the problem emerges, so this model of RJ sees an ‘offence’ as a violation of people and relationships in that community rather than a crime to be punished. It is a sign of a need for restoration, repair, rebuilding. This functionalist analogy implies some possible perfect state of harmony for schools - the authors of this chapter, however, see school as a community of diverse individuals and relationships with varying interests and concerns; a place and space where conflict is dynamic and inevitable. School principals and teachers have to continually balance a dynamic relationship between the twin priorities of academic achievement and educational inclusion, on leading change and ensuring stability for staff and children, on nurturing individuality, openness to risk and creativity whilst also providing clear boundaries and functional learning. Parents want their children to be happy at school and to feel safe but as they grow, children must test and investigate and try out identities in ways that can lead to tension. As they move into adolescence this complexity is compounded and the search for calm or harmony often elusive. These push and pull factors are also shaped by broader issues – the key dimensions of in/equality and power, at individual, family, community and society levels and also by international contexts such as the global financial downturn and the fear of terrorism. In all this, teachers and students must constantly learn, negotiate and renegotiate ways of being and working together that help prepare them for a future that is, at best only partially imaginable. RA acknowledges the potential of social and experiential learning

approaches that enable students (and staff) to understand and learn to manage their own behaviour and the fundamental importance of effective support and clear control and boundaries in this complex institution called ‘school’. . Morrison and Vaandering, in particular have emphasised RA’s potential to enable,

‘school communities that move beyond the predominant paradigm of regulatory formalism, to a paradigm that is more responsive because it entails giving back the harm or wrong doing to the community most affected and enables a process for the community to address the harm to nurturing the human capacity for restitution, resolution, and reconciliation’ (Morrison and Vaandering 2012, 140).

Harm and wrongdoing can range from fairly minor to much more serious issues. In our original study we encountered the following example (Kane et al. 2008, 73) in a special school for students with moderate learning difficulties: a boy aged 13 had been verbally threatening a girl in his class. He regularly told her he planned to set fire to her house and ‘see her burn’. He made these threats when no staff were in earshot. One day, the girl’s mother called the school in some distress to say that a picture of the burning house had been posted through their letterbox. The girl lived alone with her mother and they now felt vulnerable and afraid for their safety. It was agreed to hold a formal restorative meeting in school, involving the local community police officer due to the seriousness of this incident, which would allow the boy and his family to meet with and hear the concerns of the girl and her mother. Both families agreed to this meeting, which was carefully planned for, taking particular care to ensure that all involved understood the aims and processes and felt fully ready and supported. The school had been working restoratively for some time by then, staff were trained and skilled, and a parents group had also been running. This helped to allay fears that the boy would fail

to take the issue seriously and that this was in some sense a ‘soft option’. This is always important but particularly so in this situation where the young people involved both had learning difficulties. The meeting was inevitably a challenging one, but everyone involved had the opportunity to speak and explain their view on the situation. The boy’s family found it very hard to hear about what their son had done and the emotional effect it had had on the girl and her mother. When his turn to speak came, the boy struggled to listen and accept that his actions had caused so much anxiety. However, given time and assured that the ‘person was not the problem; the problem was the problem’, he was able to express his regret and offer an apology that was accepted in full and with relief by the girl and mother. The boy volunteered to help the girl with a task in school as part of that apology. She felt able to accept this offer too and the school monitored the situation carefully over the next few weeks. The boy’s parents later explained how hard they had found this but also how helpful it had been to have had the opportunity to listen to their son’s own anxieties and how this offered them a new perspective on future plans for him. Such examples can be found throughout the empirical literature and in the various teacher resource books such as those from Hendry (2009) and Hopkins (2004).

Recent Research in Context

There is now a burgeoning international body of literature on restorative approaches in education and findings from recent studies indicate that RA has had a major and continuing impact on most schools where it has been introduced. In Denver, U.S.A., Cavanagh et al. 2014 have undertaken an important study revealing teachers’ deficit views of students – and the impact of Latino/Hispanic parents in helping teachers to build new caring relationships based on restorative principles. In New York, Hantzopolous 2013’s research reaffirmed the need for school values to both reflect and shape

RA. Also in the U.S.A. DeWitt and DeWitt 2012, conducted a follow up study seven years after a serious incident in a school in the Mid-West led to the introduction of RA and found that the organisational and cultural change engendered had been sustained successfully. In Brazil, Grossi and dos Santos 2012 reported success for RA in tackling bullying in four schools, while in Israel, Frazer and Friedman use case studies to show how RA can help build inclusive schools (2017). It is important to note that it is only relatively recently that research in the field of RA has begun to critically engage with issues of equality in depth and issues of ‘race’ in particular. Gregory et al. (2014), for example, found that where teachers use RA they are less likely to disproportionately discipline African-American and Latino students, while Payne and Welch (2013) also in the U.S.A., report that schools with proportionately higher numbers of black students are less likely to use RA. In the UK, a study in Bristol (Skinns et al., 2009) provided evidence that school leadership teams felt well supported by RA, leading to improved attendance rates and reduced use of exclusion and an earlier study of restorative conferencing with troubled youth in England (Youth Justice Board 2004) found that while ‘not a panacea... [it] can improve school environment and enhance learning’ (2004, 65).

The largest study in the U.K. to date was undertaken by the author and colleagues Kane et. al 2008. This involved the collection and analysis of a wide range of qualitative data through formal and informal interviews with a range of Council and school staff (over 400 interviews with 162 individuals), individual and group interviews with students (138 primary and 93 secondary stage students), interviews with parents (31), observation in classrooms, playgrounds and meetings, documentary analysis as well as more quantitative methods, such as staff survey (627 returns/response rate 45%) and student surveys (1163 administered to students age 9, 11, 13 and 15),

and the collection of statistical data at school and area level, such as numbers of students expelled. At every stage the research team fed back and discussed with school managers, key personnel and council administrators, and so the evaluation process evolved in response to their concerns. The team set out in each of the 18 schools to evaluate their own distinctive aims and to gather data common to all the schools. The 18 schools progressed at different speeds, primary (elementary) schools in general finding it easier to develop whole-school approaches. In every school, as expected, staff were at different stages of knowledge and commitment; and in some there was a sense of critical mass, of changing culture and ethos. However, the evaluation was able to identify real strengths and achievements across all councils and schools. In all schools there was evidence of strong enthusiasm and commitment on the part of key staff and, in some, of real transformation of thinking and practice. Visible commitment on the part of school managers and key enthusiasts was highly significant in promoting changing practice. This evaluation and its follow up (Lloyd and McCluskey 2009) provide evidence of real transformation of thinking and practice in some schools and significant change across all the schools, albeit at varying pace and with resistance to a greater or lesser extent. One teacher noted,

‘Now it’s OK to be seen (by other staff), to be talking things through—not necessary to be seen to punish’.

(Kane et al. 2008, 53).

The legitimacy of punishment has such a deep-rooted history in education and indeed society, that this teacher’s comment highlights the significance of the cultural shift that RA had brought about here.

Our study also identified the key elements for success in restorative approaches:

- Willingness by staff and students to create opportunities for reflective change
- Readiness for RA implementation
- Clarity of purpose
- Staff morale
- Training
- Leadership and modelling
- Broadly child-centred approach
- Schools and communities making RA their own
- Commitment to equitable process
- Active involvement of all in school community with decisions about their own lives

McCluskey et al. 2008, 412)

Schools that were most successful had clear, specific and measurable goals for RA as well as broad aims. Staff in these schools talked about the importance of realistic timeframes, ‘going slowly’ and ‘taking children and staff with you’ if change were to be deep and lasting (Kane et al. 2008, 87).

As with much other research in education, it is important to acknowledge that evaluation always involves subjective judgements, with outcomes reflecting a range of relationships, not just those in the specific project or intervention under evaluation. Effectiveness is therefore difficult to measure and it is important to recognise that programmes may not directly change people, but offer people the opportunity, information and resources to change. There has been criticism of RA research on the grounds that it tends to be small-scale and most often descriptive rather than evaluative, although it is

also acknowledged that this may be due to the fact that many RA initiatives are still in the early stages (Fronius et. al. 2016) and that there is a scarcity of funding for educational research overall compared with other disciplines.

Restorative Approaches and the issues of school security, punishment and surveillance

Having outlined briefly the origins, key definitions and elements of success in embedding restorative approaches in education, we now turn to the key issues of school security, punishment and surveillance and the questions which restorative approaches raise in this context.

International research consistently finds that the majority of students are well-behaved, work hard and feel safe at school (UNICEF 2013, Donnelly 2014, Currie 2012, Black et al. 2012). Rates of disciplinary exclusion/expulsion from school have reduced over time across all four countries of the U.K. (Department for Education 2015, Scottish Government 2015), although the U.K. rates are still amongst the highest in Europe (many European countries do not permit exclusion/expulsion from school at all on disciplinary grounds). Youth offending rates have also decreased significantly (Youth Justice Board/Ministry of Justice, England 2016). Despite this, and at the same time as RJ and then RA in education have been gaining purchase internationally, the clamour about declining standards of behaviour has become ever louder, and schools have come under significant and contradictory pressures to increase their systems of surveillance (Taylor 2013) and zero tolerance of misconduct. This pressure is often also framed in terms of concern about an increasingly dangerous and uncertain world and the needs of children in schools to safety and security in these turbulent times. Schools are arguably more risk averse than they have ever been. Whilst avoiding the more

extreme levels of surveillance seen in some US schools such as body searches by armed guards or police, these concerns are reflected in the extensive use of high fencing and CCTV around all new schools in the U.K., the proliferation of policy guidance on all manner of aspects of school life and the strictures on activities. Hansberry says,

‘the crushing burden of trying to foresee, manage and respond to every possible risk to student well-being has resulted in schools spending inordinate amount of time on reports and bureaucracy about what’s being done to stop things going wrong in schools’ (Hansberry 2016, 29).

This risk aversion is also evident in findings from our own research which revealed instances in which adults in school feared (and misunderstood) RA because they saw it as ‘stealing their strength’. We spoke to teachers who were clearly anxious about RA because they saw it as diminishing their powers of control in the classroom and handing power over to students (McCluskey et al. 2011). This is perhaps an understandable concern given the hold that punitive systems have in our schools and in society at large, but not a problem where RA is implemented effectively.

In the U.K., the education systems of the four countries of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales share many features but also have significant differences in their approaches to punishment, and with devolution of powers from England to the other smaller countries of the U.K. over the last ten years, policies on discipline and exclusion/expulsion have increasingly diverged (Department for Education 2012, Scottish Government 2017, Welsh Government 2015). In England, with a strong

Right-leaning government, official approaches to behaviour management are largely punitive and make no reference to alternative or restorative responses to disruption or disaffection: current policy guidance states that schools should reinforce good behaviour with use of praise and rewards but gives no examples of how this might work. On the other hand, it devotes seven pages of its 14-page ‘Advice to Head Teachers’ to descriptions of punishments, powers to search without consent, power to use ‘reasonable force’ and use of isolation and seclusion (Department for Education, England 2016). In Scotland the relevant policy is entitled ‘Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: A Positive Approach to Preventing and Managing School Exclusions’ (2017). In the Ministerial Foreword it states that this ‘refreshed guidance gives a stronger focus on approaches that can be used to prevent the need for exclusion, ensuring all children and young people are Included, Engaged and Involved in their education’ (2017, 4). It includes advice on alternatives to punishment, and refers explicitly to the need for schools to be mindful of the known negative immediate and long term correlates of exclusion/expulsion, specifically recommending use of restorative approaches. This is also the case in Wales (Welsh Government 2015). In both Wales and Scotland, national Governments have supported and promoted the development of RA in education (Howard 2009) and a move away from use of punishment.

This rejection of punishment is still contentious however. Some will argue that punishment is a useful and necessary response to wrongdoing; that it is discipline not dialogue that gives the short, sharp shock some individual students need. Others may say that while punishment can halt a particular action or behaviour this only works in the short term and its limitations quickly become apparent. With no inbuilt opportunity to review, reflect and learn a different way of dealing with difficulty or resolving conflict, the wrongdoing is likely to reoccur and lead, in turn, to repeated

punishment. It is well known that repetition or increase in intensity of punishment tends to lead to decreased effectiveness and an entrenchment of the unwanted behaviour rather than positive change.

It is important to understand the potential role for restorative approaches in this context, and the platform it offers from which to question conventional systems of punishment, particularly in light of growing disquiet about the persistence of racial/ethnic/social class disproportionality in school surveillance and discipline practices, (Mayworm et al. 2016, Payne and Welch 2015, Gregory et al. 2011) disciplinary exclusion/expulsion rates and the ‘school-to-prison pipeline’ (Skiba, Shure and Williams 2011). The decreases in national exclusion/expulsion rates in the U.K., for example, have exposed persistent and disproportionate rates of exclusion among some groups of children and young people, many of whom already experience serious disadvantage. Research repeatedly provides evidence that the likelihood of exclusion increases with certain risk factors such as having a special educational need, being of Black-Caribbean origin (in the U.K.), being a young person of colour (in U.S.A.); being from a low socio-economic background; being ‘in care’; and being male (Strand and Fletcher 2014). Children and young people who are excluded/suspended from school are also more likely than their peers to live in lone parent families, and in conditions of material hardship with poorer health outcomes (Daniels and Cole 2010). Their families are more likely to be in debt and living in rented accommodation. Additionally, the mental health needs of young people both at risk of exclusion and currently excluded are substantial. The long-term personal consequences of unemployment are arguably highest for those excluded from school as they are only just commencing entry to the labour market. (Gazeley et al. 2013).

These factors mirror exactly the factors which predict offending and victimisation (see for example, Farrington et al. 2016), so that for example, if a young person aged 13-14 years old lives in a family with five or more of these problems, they are 36 times more likely to be excluded/suspended from school and to have contact with the police (Department of Work and Pensions, England 2012).

Much research has also shown that permanent disciplinary exclusion has many other negative long term consequences for young people, including: poor educational attainment, prolonged periods out of employment and subsequent scarring effects, poor mental and physical health, involvement in crime; and homelessness, all of which have concomitant costs for society.

Despite this body of evidence, and scant empirical support for the efficacy of punishment (notwithstanding the very good support offered by some schools and some individual teachers), it seems that education systems still tend to default to a punitive, individualising and pathologising response to challenging behaviour. Most schools as institutions maintain their power base by asking ‘what law/or code of conduct has been broken?’, ‘who did it?’ and ‘what punishment is deserved?’ (Morrison and Vaandering 2012, 148) rather than Zehr’s questions; ‘Who has been hurt? What are their needs? Whose obligations are these?’ (2003, 20).

One of the most potent responses to this position, relevant to both youth justice and education and to the inter-connectedness of these, is offered by the longitudinal Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime. Innovative in its coverage, data management and data linkage, this internationally respected research includes six annual self-report surveys from a single cohort of 3,400 children and young people, aged 12- 17; analysis of official records from police, social work, children’s hearings, schools and criminal convictions, surveys of parents and teachers, a community survey and

geographic analysis of census and police crime data. (McAra and McVie 2013). They make clear that supporting children and young people at risk of exclusion from school is a way of supporting one of the most vulnerable groups of people in society. Key findings include:

‘the links between violence and vulnerability run in both directions; for example, engagement in violence in the early teens predicts later involvement in self-harm, and vice versa (2013, 4).

and that,

‘analysis shows that the chronic conviction pathway is driven by three key factors: a sharp increase in levels of truancy from school, greater school exclusion and more adversarial police contact... by contrast the desister conviction pathway is presaged by the stabilisation or significant decline in each of these factors between the ages of 13 and 15’

(2013,7).

Significantly for RA and its emphasis on whole school, holistic, ethos building, they also found that,

‘early identification of at-risk children is not a water-tight process and may be damaging in the long term’ and ‘critical moments in the early teenage years are key to pathways out of offending.. youngsters involved in persistent and serious offending are amongst the most vulnerable group of people in our society... justice for children and young people cannot be

delivered unless their broader needs are addressed in ways that are not stigmatising and criminalising’
(2013,3).

This research, stemming from a criminological perspective, suggests there are strong ethical and economic reasons for rejecting punitive responses and seeking viable, relational alternatives such as RA. Such alternatives can empower all members of school communities, and strengthen the interconnectedness of personal, social and academic learning.

In a recent major research study, ‘The Influence of Teaching’ (2015) undertaken as part of Harvard University’s Achievement Gap Initiative, Ferguson, Phillips and colleagues examined 16,000 classrooms and present evidence from 300,000 student surveys to show that untested learning outcomes are measurable. They focus on agency and argue that,

‘Agency is the capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative- the opposite of helplessness. Young people with high levels of agency do not respond passively to their circumstances; they tend to seek meaning and act with purpose to achieve the conditions they desire in their own and others’ lives. The development of agency may be as important an outcome of schooling as the skills we measure with standardised testing’.
(Ferguson, Phillips et.al. 2015,1)

Feelings of agency are important but much more important are opportunities to express agency. Their research provides concrete and accessible examples of teacher actions that can act as either

‘agency boosters’ or ‘agency dampers’. The authors of this study conclude that classroom management is pivotal and that a positive, calm and respectful classroom is the strongest predictor of ‘value added gains on standardised exams’. They make the point that classroom management can be achieved through ‘agency dampers’ such as coercion and intimidation, but that success is linked to activity that ‘captivates’, ‘challenges’ and ‘clarifies’ (2015, 90). This makes very clear the link between behaviour, relationships and achievement.

In summary, then, research both within education and in related disciplines, provides a robust rationale for the continued support of RA in schools and it is evident that where RA is implemented successfully it can be highly effective in reducing indiscipline and in building a positive, calm and productive school climate. Recently, however, there have been much more searching questions raised about RA, and a new interrogation of the meaning of successful implementation. Earlier in this chapter, we noted our concern about the persistent and disproportionate burden of underachievement, punishment, security and surveillance on some groups of children and young people. In this final section, we now examine this emerging focus on criticality in RA and the need to actively engage deeply with the challenge of developing critical restorative approaches in education.

Critical Restorative Approaches: a new way forward?

There has been a growing realization among those interested in restorative approaches, that, even where RA has been implemented, poor children still fare worse, black children are still excluded in high numbers and overall patterns of inequality continue (Lustick 2016, Gregory et. al 2014, Cavanagh et al. 2014, Lyubansky and Barter 2011).

Greene has argued that,

‘In theory, restorative justice insists upon an individualised, creative, and free understanding of the conflict to be addressed, the parties who ought to be involved, and the resolution to make things right. In practice, this ‘new’ justice lens is employing the perspectives of the old one, holding fast to its social arrangements and convictions regarding crime and punishment (2013, 383).

Although Greene is speaking of restorative justice rather than restorative approaches in schools here, it is essential to take such questions seriously, and recognise their applicability in education too. The composition of schools reflects social inequalities and the implementation of disciplinary systems have always also reflected these disproportionalities, so that, for example, disproportionality in school exclusion/expulsions rates is an international phenomenon. Cousineau has argued that,

‘The school-to-prison pipeline is a major component of institutional racism in the United States that is maintained by means of specific school practices’ (2010, 1).

The statistics and commentary on them emphasise the need to understand that it is not only the behaviour of students themselves that must be addressed but also the way in which that behaviour is constructed. Research in the U.S.A., referred to earlier, suggests that ‘the racial composition of schools is associated with more punitive and less reparative approaches to discipline just as it has been associated with criminal justice harshness’ (Payne and Welch 2015, 539) and this raises yet

further questions; firstly, about whether RA is being used at all in schools which have large numbers of black students, and secondly, whether it is seen as suitable for use with black students in those schools where it has been implemented. In thinking about the potential priorities for development of RA now, it is necessary to keep sight of the ways in which inequalities work differently for different minority or marginalized groups, and the ways that inequalities intersect to affect the balances of power. This is, of course, much more challenging for schools than saying ‘diversity must be respected’ or ‘we celebrate diversity’. Razack offers a helpfully sensitive comment on this pressing issue;

“Encounters between dominant and subordinate groups cannot be ‘managed’ simply as pedagogical moments requiring cultural, racial, or gender sensitivity. Without an understanding of how responses to subordinate groups are socially organized to sustain those existing power arrangements, we cannot hope either to communicate across social hierarchies or to work to eliminate them.” (1998, 8).

There is much work for advocates of RA still to do to ensure that it is culturally responsive and experienced as positive by *all* students, and indeed *all* staff. The questions being asked of RA in U.S.A. and the experiences of youth of colour are paralleled by the experiences of children already living with multiple disadvantage in many other countries. Core to taking RA forward, therefore, must be a willingness to synergise the learning from our own research about the change it can bring to school culture and climate (McCluskey et al. 2008, Lloyd and McCluskey 2009), with the evidence from McAra and McVie’s study of youth crime (2013), on the effectiveness of whole school approaches and the need to avoid use of disciplinary exclusion, and finally from Ferguson et al. (2015) and their work on the influence of teaching and the importance of agency. If RA is to

avoid being co-opted as an instrument of social control, then this commitment to social engagement and action must be a work of critical vigilance.

Conclusions

There is convincing evidence of the need for RA and for its effectiveness when implemented with fidelity, consistency and enthusiasm. Restorative approaches can be seen to work at all levels of the school, including for those in trouble or conflict. RA can support staff as well as students and, crucially it is non-pathologising: students do not need to be labelled or stigmatized. It promotes student and staff participation in school processes and decision-making. It promotes student voice and agency. It does so by offering a structure and framing of principles, values, skills and strategies which represent a distinctive departure from conventional, punitive approaches to discipline and behaviour management. However, as this chapter has also noted, if RA is to continue to do this essential work and to have legitimacy, advocates must now actively, and critically, engage with the challenge posed by conventional regimes of punishment and surveillance and their disproportionate impact on those already disadvantaged and disenfranchised in and by education.

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