



A review of restorative practice: From punitive to restorative

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Frontispiece

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Article 29 of the UNCRC states, “Children’s education should develop each child’s personality, talents and abilities to the fullest” (UNICEF, 1989). The author fully endorses this principle and is passionate about developing his own practice to ensure that every child he teaches receives the support required to allow them to fulfil their potential. During the authors professional teaching experience (PTE), which took place across three different primary schools, he identified behaviour as a factor that has a detrimental impact on children reaching their potential.

During PTE, the author also observed a wide range of behaviour management strategies. Some allowed teachers to quickly address the disruptive behaviour and ensure minimal disruption to learning. However, in many other instances, the strategies used led to a significant loss in teaching and learning time. The author observed how the behaviour of some children hindered the progress of not only themselves, but also other learners in the class. During a discussion between the author and an experienced teacher, the teacher remarked, “children these days just don’t care, they have no respect and it is getting worse. Teachers are powerless and the kids know it”.

During 2-weeks of observation at a secondary school, the author was introduced to the Pivotal Approach to behaviour management. The Pivotal Approach was developed by Paul Dix and promotes the use of restorative practice. Restorative practice is “a behaviour management method that aims to help students develop conflict resolution and aggression management skills” (Short, Case and McKenzie, 2018, p. 313). Restorative practice is based on the principles of restorative justice and has been adopted in several countries around the world (Drewery, 2016). It allows children or adults who have been wronged to discuss the impact of the wrongdoing with the perpetrator. Furthermore, it requires that the perpetrator understands the impact of their behaviour and takes responsibility for resolving the conflict (Dix, 2017; Restorative Justice Council, 2016). Howard wrote:

Unlike punitive approaches, in which a third-party acts as judge, jury and executioner, restorative practice predicates upon ownership of behaviour and

conflict resting with those directly involved, who also retain responsibility for resolution of the problem (Howard, 2009, p. 5)

After witnessing the positive impact of restorative justice, the author decided to conduct a research project to consider the benefits and limitations of using restorative practice in schools.

The authors hypothesis is that restorative practice has the potential to be a powerful strategy for managing behaviour and maintaining a positive learning environment. However, the author also believes that inconsistent application by individual teachers, will be a limiting factor in the effectiveness of the approach. The author also conjectures that restorative practice will be an effective strategy for moderately disruptive children, however, it will be a less effective approach for children who frequently display extremely challenging behaviour.

The rationale for choosing this research area is linked to the authors passion for supporting children from disadvantaged homes and disadvantaged communities. Following his academic studies, the author aims to teach in a school which supports a disadvantaged community. With behaviour likely to be a more significant factor in such a setting (Welsh Government, 2018), this project will allow the author to reflect on his own pedagogy and use the knowledge gained through the research, to shape and enhance his practice. Through the act of reflecting on classroom experiences, teachers can develop their pedagogy and achieve a level of professional expertise (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1987). Pollard et al. supports these views and wrote, “given the nature of teaching, professional development and learning should never stop” (2008, p. 5). The Welsh Government simplifies the benefits of reflective practice stating it “helps you to improve what you do” (2015, p. 3).

The research methods selected to review the effectiveness of restorative practice include questionnaires, observations, interviews and a review of existing research and literature. The author gathered research and data and conducted observations in both primary and secondary school settings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In a 2016 survey of 859 teachers, 56% believed that pupil behaviour has deteriorated over the last 5 years, with 45% stating it had declined even further in the last 2 years (ATL, 2016). Dr Mary Bousted (2016, quoted in ATL, 2016, p.1) stated, “Staff get ground down daily by the chatting and messing around, which disrupts lessons for other pupils and takes the pleasure out of teaching”.

A 2018 Welsh Government statistical first release reported a rise in both fixed term and permanent exclusions across schools in Wales. The most common reason for a fixed term exclusion was “persistent disruptive behaviour”. The most common reason for a permanent exclusion was “physical assault against an adult”. The report also identified that exclusion rates of children eligible for free school meals (FSM) are at least 3 times higher than children not eligible for FSM (Welsh Government, 2018). Reducing the attainment gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children who are not from disadvantaged backgrounds is a key priority for Kirsty Williams (2017 quoted in Welsh Government, 2017). Therefore, schools need to develop behaviour management strategies which address this significant statistic.

Before any behaviour strategy can be effective and sustainable, schools and teachers need to understand the different factors that can influence behaviour. The Welsh Government identifies “five basic models in understanding child behaviour: biological, behavioural, cognitive, systemic and psychodynamic” (2012, p. 4). The biological model encompasses biological and environmental influences. Nativists such as Chomsky (1965) argue that behaviour and personality is a direct result of genetics. Whereas behaviourists such as Skinner (1957) and Bandura (1977) believe children are born with a blank slate, and behaviour and personality are predominantly influenced by the environment children are exposed to. However, recent research shows that both nature and nurture play an important role in behavioural development (Sunder, 2018; Levitt, 2013). Therefore, when developing behaviour management strategies, schools need to pay consideration to both of these factors.

Traditionally, schools have adopted a punitive approach to behaviour management. A punitive approach works on the premise that when a child does something wrong, they need to be punished. As recently as the 1990's schools across the UK could use corporal punishment as a tactic to address behavioural issues. However, in 1986 legislation was introduced banning the use of corporal punishment in state schools (*Education (No.2) Act 1986*, C.61). In 1998 it was extended to private schools (*School Standards and Framework Act 1998*, C.31). Introducing the new legislation MP Don Foster stated, "There is no evidence that... corporal punishment is an effective deterrent, either for a child who may have been misbehaving nor indeed is it a deterrent for other children" (1998, cited in BBC, 1998).

Despite a move away from corporal punishment, many schools still rely on punishment as their main strategy for addressing behavioural issues. Teachers regularly use phrases such as: "you are going to miss your play", "you are in detention during lunch", "you can sit on your own for the rest of the lesson" or "I will phone home..." (Wright, 2005; Ellis and Tod, 2015). In America, the idea of punitive punishment was taken a step further during the 90's with many schools adopting a zero-tolerance approach to certain types of behaviour. The argument in favour of such an approach was that if punishments were unyielding and sufficiently severe, they would deter children from engaging in disruptive behaviour (Skiba and Knesting, 2001).

However, numerous research studies have shown that punitive punishments are extremely ineffective at addressing behaviour problems in schools. In many instances, they serve only to compound problems and create an unhealthy barrier between teacher and pupil (Topping, 1983; McManus, 1997; Dix, 2017). Wills also argues that a punitive approach encourages the "attitude that misbehaviour could be paid for, the slate being wiped clean for fresh villainy" (1945, quoted in McManus, 1997, p.9). Furthermore, Kohn (2013) believes that punitive approaches have a detrimental impact on children's moral and social development. They encourage children to ask, "what will happen if I don't do it?", rather than getting children to think about the type of person they want to be. A system which is unilaterally focused on punishment, misses the opportunity to turn behaviour violations into meaningful learning experiences (Suvall, 2009). In contrast, restorative justice provides a platform and non-judgemental environment where wrongdoers can reflect of their behaviour and learn how to better conduct themselves in future (Macready, 2009).

Another problem with punitive strategies is the question of ‘what next?’. If initial punitive sanctions fail to correct the poor behaviour, teachers are typically left with no other option other than to increase the sanctions. A philosophy of, make the punishment more severe, make the child suffer even more. This escalation of punishment can have extremely destructive outcomes. Comer and Poussaint argue that overly harsh punishment “either destroys a child’s spirit, has no effect at all, worsens the problem, or makes it more difficult to work with the child in school” (2000, p.8). In some instances, it can lead to a break down of trust between pupil and teacher (Comer and Poussaint, 2000; Kohn, 2013).

Punitive approaches also fail to recognise the needs of the victim. Suvall (2009, p. 553) wrote, “conventional punitive discipline contains no mechanism to validate victims’ concerns or to reassure them that they will not be victimized in future”. It could be argued that through the use of punitive punishment, we are teaching children that wrongdoing is corrected through punishment. Therefore if a perpetrator feels harshly dealt with, they may consider an appropriate response is to punish the victim for getting them into trouble. In contrast, the needs of the victim are central to restorative practice. Dix (2017, pp. 125-126) believes that if we want to develop a society where people “look out for each other”, it is imperative that children leave school with the ability to consider how their actions impact others. Children need to be able to take responsibility for their actions, show empathy towards those who have suffered and use each instance of bad behaviour as an opportunity to reflect, learn and develop.

The ultimate sanction in many punitive procedures is exclusion. When all other measures have failed, schools can resort to removing a child for a fixed period or on a permanent basis. Children eligible for FSM are disproportionately represented in exclusion figures (Ford et al., 2017). Barnardo’s found that children receiving FSM are “five times as likely to be excluded from school than their better-off counterparts” (2010, p. 1). This is another example of the most disadvantaged children facing additional barriers to fulfilling their potential. Suvall (2009) believes that exclusions deny educational opportunities to the children who often need them the most. Another concerning issue surrounding school exclusions is the “bidirectional relationship between exclusion from school and psychopathology in children” (Ford et al., 2017, p. 19). Fortunately, schools, education authorities and governments, widely recognise the detrimental impact of expulsions and view this as a last resort. In Wales there was a

sustained effort to reduce the number of exclusions. Between 2002 and 2013, exclusions rates dropped by 50% (StatsWales, 2013). However, more recent figures have shown rates starting to slowly rise again.

In acknowledgement of the growing body of evidence highlighting the shortcomings of punitive approaches, some practitioners have tried to introduce the idea of consequences rather than punishments. Wright has a sub heading in his book titled “How do I prevent consequences becoming punishments?” (2005, p. 91). Despite the title, the text within the section fails to make any clear distinctions between punishments and consequences. Lewis also favours consequences over punishments and introduces the idea of ‘stepped consequences’ (2009, p. 101). Yet when reading through Lewis’ stepped consequences, they are indistinguishable from a list of punishments. The author agrees with Kohn (2013) that often writers and practitioners rebrand punishments as consequences and do little else to differentiate between the two. However, Lemov, Hernandez and Kim do make a distinction, emphasising that consequences should not be ‘a euphemism for a punishment’ (2016, p. 557). They argue that consequences should not simply be punitive, they should be purposeful and facilitate a learning experience.

With many practitioners and academics questioning the effectiveness of punitive school discipline (Drewery and Kecskemeti, 2010; Dublin 2016; Dix, 2017) and behaviour issues becoming more prevalent (Suvall, 2009; ATL, 2016), schools and policy makers are seeking new approaches to behaviour management. Restorative practice is an approach that is gaining international traction and becoming increasingly prevalent in schools (McCluskey et al., 2008; Short, Case and McKenzie, 2018). The International Institute for Restorative Practice (IIRP) offer the following definition:

The fundamental unifying hypothesis of restorative practices is disarmingly simple: that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour, when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them (2008, p. 1).

Restorative justice is “a participatory and democratic justice that focuses on the community defined by the incident and not just the wrongdoer” (Thorsborne and Vinegard, 2008, p. 8).

It provides a forum where victims, perpetrators and other individuals impacted by the incident are brought together to discuss how the situation can be repaired (Zehr and Mika, 1998). The discussions focus on educating the perpetrator about the distress caused by their behaviour (Bazemore and Umbreit, 2005). A key element of a restorative process is the acknowledgement of guilt by the wrongdoer. Opponents of restorative justice argue that for minor offences children may superficially commit to a restorative conversation in the hope of reducing any potential ramifications (Wenzel, M. et al., 2008). The author witnessed this behaviour during a restorative conversation between a teacher and a year 7 pupil. During the conversation, the wrongdoer appeared remorseful and apologised for his actions. However, once the child returned to class, it was evident from his actions and the conversation he had with his peers, that it had been an act to satisfy the teacher.

Suvall (2009) also identifies an issue with using restorative practice in incidents of more serious misconduct. Suvall makes the point that when a more serious offence has occurred, wrongdoers are unlikely to admit their guilt as the stakes are too high. Despite these concerns, research has shown that in schools which concentrate on helping children modify their behaviour, rather than focusing on controlling their behaviour, children are more likely to adhere to expectations (Cameron and Thorsborne, 2001).

To mitigate against the risk of children putting on superficial displays of engagement or children refusing to acknowledge any portion of blame, the facilitator of any restorative processes needs to be skilled in the art of neutral questions and depersonalizing language. Neutral questions encourage children to share what happened and explain the events from their perspective. By asking “what happened”, rather than “why did you do that”, children are more likely to open up and are less likely to become evasive and defensive (Dublin, 2016, p. 19). Depersonalising the language, allows the actions to be judged rather than the individuals (Lemov, Hernandez and Kim, 2016, p. 557).

Dix (2017, pp. 128-130) believes that an effective restorative conversation only requires five overarching questions. He suggests teachers choose five from his pick list:

- What happened?

- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought since?
- How did this make people feel?
- Who has been affected?
- How have they been affected?
- What should we do to put things right?
- How can we do things differently in future?

Through the art of skilful questioning, children can begin to understand things from other perspectives and they can develop their sense of empathy and their sense of what is right and equitable.

Applying the principles of restorative justice to a school context, requires a whole school approach and commitment (Howard, 2009). With some commentators (Blood and Thorsborne, 2005; McCluskey et al., 2008) arguing it could take between 5 and 10 years for restorative practice to permeate through a school's culture, it is a significant commitment for a school to make. Particularly when considering that research in to the effectiveness of restorative practice in schools is mixed.

Research shows that restorative practice benefits behaviour, attendance, school culture and academic attainment (Fronius et al., 2016; Drewery, 2016). Furthermore, the impact of restorative practice is not limited to behaviour management. Improved behaviour is a biproduct of the social development which can be achieved through restorative processes. Drewery argues that “restorative justice in schools is not about resolving specific conflicts, but rather, about the production and maintenance of respectful relationship, which is the antithesis of colonised relationship” (2016, p. 191). This view is supported by McCluskey et al. (2008).

In contrast, while studying the impact of restorative practice on a boy in secondary school, Standing, Fearon and Dee found that although the child developed his ability to speak about his behaviour with an adult, when put back in class “he was unable to make a conscious decision to alter his negative behaviour” (2012, p. 355).

While research is still in its relative infancy, the weight of opinion anecdotally, quantitatively and qualitatively is in favour on the positive impact of restorative practice. As well as being an effective strategy for behaviour management, the research suggests that restorative practice can have a positive impact on the learning environment and broader school community (Dix, 2017; Drewery and Kecskemeti, 2010; UWTSD, 2016).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Before undertaking any research, the author ensured all activity complied with ethical guidelines issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018), the Education Workforce Council (EWC) (2015) and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (2017) (*Appendix 1*). Cohen et al. (2011) identify the inextricable link between research and ethics and highlight the importance of ensuring that research is obtained in an ethically permissible manner. Prior to engaging with staff or children at any of the schools participating in this research project, the author gained permission from an approved member of the school's senior leadership team. The author highlighted to relevant UWTSD staff and relevant staff at the participating schools, that as he was researching behaviour, it was likely he would need to covertly observe some potentially volatile situations. In such scenarios, it would be impractical to intervene and gain individual consent. It was therefore agreed that this research of this nature was defensible and complied with guidelines. For research collated in this manner, the anonymity of the subjects was strictly upheld. This is consistent with BERA guidelines.

Throughout the research project all participants were treated equally, without prejudice and with respect. Prior to each interview or questionnaire, the author gained the consent of the participants and explained that they could choose to not answer any questions they did not want to and they could withdraw from the process at any point, without the need for an explanation. During any research activity involving children, the author also paid due consideration to the UNCRC, in particular: Article 3, best interests of the child; and Article 13, freedom of expression (UNICEF, 1989). All data obtained during the project was anonymised and stored in accordance with the GDPR (European Commission, 2018). At the end of the project all data was erased.

In order to explore the use of restorative practice in schools, the author chose to utilise a range of different research strategies. Through a combination of observation, questionnaires, interviews and analysis of existing research and literature, the author was able to consider and synthesise a range of data sources.

Due to the nature of the research topic, observation was a vital component of the project. Bailey outlines how during observation, researchers are ‘able to discern ongoing behaviour as it occurs and are able to make appropriate notes about its salient features’ (1994, pp. 243-244). Furthermore, DeMunck and Sobo (1998) comment that observation allows researchers backstage access. The author agrees and believes that observation allows researchers to witness events in uncontrived situations. However, Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) highlight a disadvantage of observation, arguing it is too subjective and relies too heavily on the researcher’s interpretation of events. Acknowledging this concern, the author ensured all observations were recorded factually and without bias. If a conversation was observed, the author recorded the specific language used in the exchange.

Questionnaires were another important component of the study and provided numerical data for statistical analysis. The author developed a pupil specific questionnaire (*Appendix 2*) and staff specific questionnaire (*Appendix 3*). Cohen et al. (2011) highlight how questionnaires are an intrusion to the respondent. Therefore, the author decided to limit the time imposition placed on the respondents and restricted the questionnaire to 10 questions. Phellas, Bloch and Seale (2012) point out that misinterpretation is a notable disadvantage of questionnaires. To mitigate against this, the author chose to conduct the questionnaires in person. While this limited the number of questionnaires that could be completed, it allowed the author to clarify points and give participants the opportunity to expand on their answers. Many of the questionnaires led in to informal discussions, more aligned to a research interview. To avoid corrupting the data in the questionnaires, the author completed the questions in the questionnaire, before returning to any points that allowed for further discussion.

The final research acquisition strategy was interviews. The interviews provided valuable qualitative data gathering and allowed the researcher to identify factors he had not previously considered. Docherty and Sandelowski highlighted a benefit of interviewing children stating they are ‘the best sources of information about themselves’ (1999, p. 177). However, Wright and Powell (2006) point out that children sometimes answer without thinking or only provide answers that they think will portray them in a positive light. During some of the group interviews the author conducted, the author felt that some children were guilty of this and were manipulating answers, to portray themselves in a positive light in front of their peers.

Despite developing a range of strategies to acquire research, there were some limitations to the study. Limitations were primarily linked to sample size and time. Although the author was able to make observations across three PTE's, the questionnaires and pupil interviews were limited to one secondary school setting. While this means that many of the variables were kept consistent, the narrow demographic of the sample and the fact it is limited to a secondary school, needs to be considered when evaluating the findings and applying them to a primary school context.

A further limitation is that the research does not include questionnaire responses from teachers or support staff. The participating school insisted on changing the questions in the questionnaire before agreeing to send it to the teaching staff. The author felt the revised questions were structured in such a way they would lead the respondents to answer in a particular fashion. Research by Rugg (1941) and Kamoen (2012) found that how a question was structured could significantly distort the results of a survey or questionnaire. For this reason, the author chose to exclude this data set. However, the author was able to obtain some valuable insight from teachers during informal discussions which took place immediately after restorative conversations had taken place. In this instance, the author gained consent from individual teachers, confirming their agreement for the conversation to be transcribed and used in the final research as required.

The final limitation is the unpredictable and spontaneous nature of behaviour related incidents. This meant it was difficult for the author to plan the observation of restorative practice in action. In some instances teaching staff delayed any restorative action until the author was present. However, the delay in the process and the presence of the author, could have impacted how the pupils responded during the restorative action.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to discuss and evaluate the quantitative and qualitative data obtained during the research project. It is worth noting that each of the schools who contributed to the research are schools who have committed time and money to developing a Restorative Practice philosophy. The following are extracts from the schools' websites or prospectuses:

School A: 'We encourage restorative conversations that allow all involved to work in collaboration to reach a positive outcome whilst maintaining their dignity'

School B:

Effective Restorative Practices foster awareness of how others have been affected by inappropriate behaviour. This is done by actively engaging participants in a process which separates the deed from the doer and rejects the act not the actor (Restorative Justice 4 Schools, 2012, p. 4)

School C: 'Taking responsibility for actions is a key element of our Restorative Approach and we only use exclusion as a last resort.'

The first question the author wanted to explore was how significant a factor behaviour was at the schools in question. There was a distinct difference in the responses from pupils, teachers who were not part of their school's leadership team, and teachers who were part of the school's leadership team.

Question 1: *Does behaviour often impact learning at this school?*

30 children responded via the questionnaire to this question. 93.3% felt that behaviour often impacted their learning. During interviews or informal conversations, the author posed this question to 6 teachers who were not part of their schools leadership teams, 100% felt that disruptive behaviour impacted learning. In contrast, the author spoke to 5 members of school

leadership teams and 80% responded that disruptive behaviour does not often impact learning. It is difficult to draw any conclusions from these disparate findings due to the personal nature of how the responses were gathered from the teachers. The 6 teachers who felt that behaviour did often impact learning, were all talking to the author shortly after an incident of poor behaviour. In these scenarios it would have been difficult for the teachers to respond that behaviour did not often have an impact on learning. Furthermore, a teacher may feel they are setting themselves up for future failure if they said behaviour did not often impact learning. As they were aware of the authors ongoing presence and the purpose of the observation, it would have taken a teacher with absolute trust in the system, to feel confident that there would not be any further instances where the learning would be interrupted.

Considering the 80% of teachers, who were part of their school's leadership team, responding that behaviour did not often impact learning. In order for these respondents to say that behaviour did often impact behaviour, they would in effect be admitting the policies they had implemented were failing. Therefore, it is difficult to assess how much credence to add to these responses. With each of the schools having a strong commitment and investment in restorative practice, it is perhaps unsurprising that the leadership teams at each school were extremely positive about its impact and results. Typical replies from members of school leadership teams to the question, "What has been the impact of restorative practice at this school?", were:

Deputy Head, School A, "Restorative practice has transformed the behaviour of the pupils. The kids now understand they will be held accountable and it has encouraged them to think before they act".

Member of Senior Leadership Team, School C, "I have worked here for 13 years and the children behave better now than ever. Teachers are shouting less, but that's because we don't need to shout as often. Restorative conversations allow a calm evaluation of what has happened and a much quicker route to a satisfactory outcome".

Without ignoring the valuable insight gained from questionnaires and interviews, the author decided that as behaviour is such an emotive subject, he would change the focus of the data acquisition strategy away from questionnaires and interviews and place more emphasis on direct observations. The author believed he would encounter less bias through direct observation. Ideally the author would have a data set of anonymous questionnaires from teachers, however, due to the restrictions placed on him by the school, this was not an available option.

Through numerous observations, the author witnessed restorative practice in authentic real-life contexts. During follow up discussions with teachers, the author gained valuable insight into teachers' personal opinions on restorative practice.

One compelling piece of data obtained through the questionnaire issued to the children, was the children's universal agreement that teachers did not deal with behaviour consistently.

Question 7: *Do all teachers deal with behaviour issues in the same way? Please explain your answer.*

100% of the 30 respondents said 'No'. Examples of the children's explanations included: 'some teachers shout, but others just talk to you'; 'some teachers are sound but lots of teachers don't care'; and 'most of them do but supply teachers don't know the rules and you can do what you want with them'.

These responses are consistent with the authors observations throughout his time at all three schools. While some teachers used restorative practice consistently, others used it occasionally and some did not use it and instead choose to use a punitive justice to address poor behaviour. As discussed in chapter two, implementing a whole school approach to restorative practice is not a quick fix and can take a number of years (Blood and Thorsborne, 2005; McCluskey et al., 2008). It often requires a significant change to the habitual stance of many experienced practitioners. Teachers who themselves were educated in an environment of punitive discipline and who may have taught using a punitive approach to behaviour management for many years,

may find it challenging to change their pedagogy (Drewery and Kecskemeti, 2010; Short, Case and McKenzie, 2018). Particularly if they believe their methods have been successful.

The inconsistent application of restorative practice by individual teachers, makes studying the long-term impact challenging. However, inconstant approaches did allow the author to observe the short-term impact of restorative practice in direct comparison to a punitive approach. Over a two-day period, a year 7 boy (Child A) was twice involved in behaviour related incidents. Child A was considered a challenging child and was frequently removed from class. The teacher in the first incident used a punitive approach, while the teacher in the second incident adopted restorative practice.

In the first incident the author observed another child (Child B) throw a rubber across the class at Child A. The rubber struck Child A and he responded by throwing the rubber back. The rubber struck Child B who immediately said “sir, (Child A), just threw a rubber at me”. The teacher immediately turned to Child A and the following exchange took place:

Teacher: *“Do you really think it is a good idea to throw things across the class?”, “You are not in primary school anymore, it’s about time you grow up”*

Child A: *“Sir it wasn’t...”* (interrupted before he could finish)

Teacher: *“I am not interested in your excuses, I have heard them all before”*

Child A: *“But XXXX threw the rubber first”*

Teacher: *“Are you really choosing to argue with me?”, “go and stand outside the class”*

This exchange resulted in an agitated teacher, a disrupted class and Child A missing almost the entire lesson. Furthermore, the author suspects Child A would have felt a great sense of injustice as Child B had not received any sanctions, despite initiating the incident. Following the lesson the teacher remarked to the author “he is 11 now, he should know better”. Dix (2017) is particularly condemning of the phrase ‘should know better’. He argues that it is unrealistic to expect all children to have finished learning about appropriate behaviour by the end of Primary School. Furthermore, Dix believes that

teaching and reteaching expected behaviours is “critical in secondary school where children are moving between teachers” (2017, p. 22).

In the second incident, Child A was arguing with another child (Child C) over something being taken from a pencil case. Child C alleged that Child A had taken a pen without consent. The two boys were arguing and it interrupted the teacher’s introduction to the lesson. The following exchange took place:

Teacher: *“Boys I understand you are both frustrated, listen carefully while I finish my introduction because I want to make sure you all understand how to use the equipment safely. Once I have finished, we will have a chat and resolve the situation. Is that fair?”*

Both children: *“Yes Miss”*

The teacher finished her introduction without interruption and asked the children, including Child A and Child C, to collect the scientific equipment they required. The teacher then calmly walked over and the following discussion took place:

Teacher: *“Thanks for letting me finish the introduction and well done for getting the equipment you needed. Can you explain to me what happened?”*

Child A: *“I needed a pen and I borrowed one from Child C”*

Teacher: *“Ok did you ask if you could borrow a pen?”*

Child A: *“No”*

Teacher: *“Ok. If someone borrowed something of mine without asking, I would feel pretty frustrated. In fact my sister borrowed my shoes last week and didn’t ask. I was really cross. How do you think xxxx felt when his pen was taken?”*

Child A: *“Probably annoyed”*

Teacher: *“Ok. So next time what could have been done differently?”*

Child A: *“I should ask (turns to Child C), Sorry”*

Child C: *“That’s ok, you can use the pen if you need to”*

Teacher: “*Thanks boys for how well you fixed this*”

This short restorative exchange was skilfully handled with minimal disruption to the class and Child A and Child C fully engaged in the rest of the session. The author was struck by how calm the teacher remained and he chose to observe her for two more sessions. Each time there was a behaviour incident, the teacher remained extremely calm and extremely consistent and de-escalated incidents quickly and effectively.

Dix argues there is no ‘magic behaviour solution...the answer lies in the ability of adults to deliver behaviour policy and practice that is simple, highly effective and utterly consistent’ (2017, p. 3). Lemov, Hernandez and Kim (2016) support the principle of consistency arguing that children are less likely to misbehave and test teachers, if they know the teacher has a consistent approach to addressing poor behaviour. The author shares the view that consistency of approach is vital. Whilst observing teachers who applied restorative practice consistently, the author was struck by how effective it was at addressing behaviour related incidents. However, during the authors observations, consistency was an aspect that was distinctly lacking across the teaching population. While each school considered restorative practice to be at their heart of their culture and strategy, the author witnessed punitive sanctions being used instead of restorative practice on a frequent basis.

How often is a child removed from class

30 responses

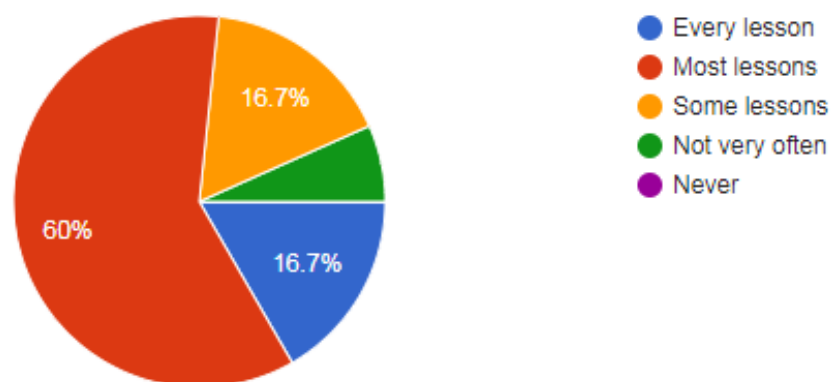


Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that 76.7% of pupils believe that children get removed from class in the majority of lessons. Based on the authors personal observations, he believes this figure is a little higher than the reality. However, the author did observe the punitive sanction of a child being removed from class, happen on a frequent basis. Often without any form of restorative practice taking place prior to or following the punitive sanction.

During interviews and discussions with teachers, one challenge that was identified by even those staunchly in support of restorative practice, was the difficulty of implementing a restorative process during incidents of extremely challenging behaviour. This is consistent with the findings of the UWTSD (2016) when they conducted research into restorative practice in schools across Swansea. Often children displaying the most challenging behaviour are from disadvantaged backgrounds and are raised in families who have different “parental attitudes and educational aspirations for their children” (Harkness, Gregg and MacMillan, 2012, p.29). These are the children who could benefit significantly from consistently applied restorative practice. Using punitive sanctions such as removing a child from class or excluding them from school, is not only damaging to the child, it also creates yet more educational inequality.

Despite these concerns, the author did witness a small number of teachers using restorative practice effectively when dealing with extreme behaviour. The common factors in each instance was the calmness of the teacher and the consistency of their approach. Dix (2017) highlights the importance of teachers remaining calm, consistent and un-shockable, when address extreme behaviour. Neutrality is another important aspect and perhaps one of the most difficult to implement when dealing with children who are persistent offenders. However, neutrality is essential to maintaining the integrity of restorative practice (Howard, 2009; Lemov, Hernandez and Kim, 2016). Rigby believes, “any perceived hostility on the part of the practitioner can result in the offender feeling resentment rather than contrition and incline him or her to act anti-socially” (2013, p. 2).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Evaluating the effectiveness of restorative practice is challenging due to the extremely broad range of variables. Consideration needs to be given to factors such as: the demographic of the school, the pedagogy and beliefs of individual teachers, the strength and strategy of school leadership teams, parental engagement, community support and the individual nature of pupils. Considering these variables, the relatively limited available research and the limitations of this research project, it is difficult to definitively prove the effectiveness of restorative practice. However, Braithwaite (2014, p.3) argues that ‘even in the face of heterogeneity problems’, there is encouraging evidence that restorative practice works. Bitel (2005, p.13) agrees and believes that “restorative practice can ‘improve the school environment, enhance learning and encourage young people to become more responsible and empathetic’”. In addition, research into bullying, conducted by Department for Education, found that restorative practice supported the development of social and emotional skills and was the most effective strategy at combating bullying (Thompson and Smith, 2010, p.31).

The findings of this study, combined with broad academic support and a growing body of existing research, offers a triangulation of data which provides a compelling case for using restorative practice as a behaviour management strategy. Furthermore, the author agrees with McClusky et al (2008) and Drewery (2016) that when a whole school approach to restorative practice is adopted, it can have a profound impact on the social development of the pupils and help them understand how their actions impact the community around them. One recommendation the author would make is around consistency. To maximise the impact of restorative practice, it must be applied consistently by each member of staff, in each behaviour related incident. This will require a habitual change for many teachers, but in the words of Dix, “when the adults change, everything changes” (2017, p.1).

In Wales, Professor Donaldson has set out four key purposes for the new curriculum. One of the purposes states that children and young people educated in Wales should develop as “ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world” (2015, p.29), the author believe restorative practice can be an effective contributor to achieving this objective.

In adopting restorative practice into his own pedagogy, the author has found it an effective strategy for behaviour management, but also for encouraging children to think more deeply about their actions and the implications of their choices. In addition, through restorative practice, the author is able to avoid the power plays that can occur between teacher and pupil. Dix believes effective restorative practice stops teachers “travelling down conversational cul-de-sacs with children who are just waiting for the ‘Get Out’!” (2017, pp. 143-144).

Despite concluding that restorative practice is an effective strategy for both behaviour management and social development, it is clear that more research is needed in this area. In isolation this small-scale research study does not advance the debate around restorative practice. However, it does add to the limited but growing body of research highlighting the valuable contribution restorative practice can make to children, teachers, schools and the broader community.

Chapter 6: Reference List

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Chapter 7: Appendices

See other attachment*