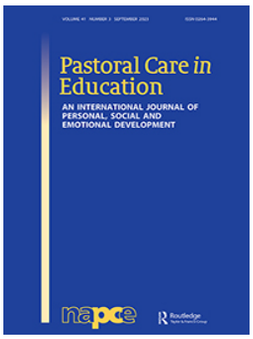

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Relational responsibility, social discipline and behaviour in school: re-orienting discipline and authority through a distributed network of relational accountability

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an exploration of a non-hierarchical model of discipline observed in one Secondary School in the North-East of England, that employed the whole-school use of Restorative Practice enhanced by vertically structured Coaching Groups. This model supported a school community characterised by working restoratively with others to achieve an environment of high challenge-high support (Wachtel, 2013). Drawing on an original evaluation of Embedding Restorative Practice in Schools (Warin & Hibbin, 2020), the 'Distributed Network of Relational Accountability' (Hibbin & Warin, 2021) that this school created was based on relationship over authority and collective accounts of responsibility over individualised notions of blame. This model is described and unpacked, to understand how such a relationship-centred approach to behaviour that disrupts traditional ways of engaging with discipline in school, can be implemented and sustained over time. Key themes in relation to the modelling and practice of pro-social skills within the context of Coaching, and the democratization of the disciplinary system through discernment and knowing the child, are explored. It is suggested that such practice that is based on notions of Relational Responsibility (McNamee & Gergen, 1999) alongside a whole school ethos of care (Warin, 2017) fosters commitment, pro-social ability and ultimately leads to more democratic versions of Restorative Practice. In addition, it supplies both students and teachers with important opportunities for community building and disclosure, through exposure to diversity within the secure family base of the Coaching Group.

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Coaching groups; restorative practice; behaviour; discipline; pro-social skills

Introduction

The concept of Relational Accountability (RA) has been used in scholarship with indigenous peoples, referring to ethical guidelines for undertaking research with community collaborators (Reo, 2019). Its origin derives from Wilson and

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Wilson (1998) who make connections to McNamee and Gergen's (1999) more psychologically linked concept of Relational Responsibility (RR), through the idea that both RA and RR 'express views oriented in the direction of an Indigenous world view … [giving] homage to *all our relations*' (Wilson & Wilson, 1998, p. 157). From the position of RR, the core proposal is that 'the discourse of individual responsibility (and its outcomes in action) is severely limited – intellectually, ideologically, and pragmatically' (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p. 3). It is this latter perspective of RR that will form the basis of the assertion being made here that within the context of schooling there are better ways to engage with blame and discipline than the methods delineated by traditional systems of behaviour management.

An example of a more progressive way of managing behaviour was modelled in one school in the North-East of England – Auden Downs Secondary School (pseudonym) – that is the focus of research outlined in a nation-wide evaluation of Embedding RP In Schools (Warin & Hibbin, 2020). This school had implemented a model of whole-school Restorative Practice (RP) that was enhanced by vertically structured Coaching Groups (CGs) across school. In these groups, students met on a tri-weekly basis in a facilitated peer coaching process (Showers & Joyce, 1996), for the duration of their time in school. A key difference between the kind of vertical tutoring seen at Auden Downs is that most Vertical Tutor Groups (VTGs) are delivered by teachers with groups of approximately 25–30 students. In contrast, the 'Coach' role at in this school was taken on by all adults with small groups of 8–12 students. They were able to provide these smaller groupings in contrast to traditional models of vertical tutoring, by utilising all staff members regardless of status (Barnard, 2022). This paper explores this unorthodox model of relational accountability through a distributed network that was shored up by RP *through* Coaching, unpacking how it was maintained and sustained by all members of the school community over time.

The aim of this work is to understand how similar models based on relationships over authority and collective accounts of responsibility over individualised notions of blame can be most effectively developed and sustained. It is suggested that such collective and non-hierarchical systems of relational and restorative support can ultimately disrupt traditional approaches to discipline in school (González et al., 2019) and embed a whole-school ethos of both accountability and care.

Literature review

The will to punish

As suggested by Parsons (2005), the 'will to punish' as a punitive response to difficult behaviour is 'deeply embedded' (p.194). Rates of school

exclusion in the UK have increased substantially since 2012 (McCluskey et al., 2019), and while rates of young people in detention have been declining in recent years, the UK still imprisons large numbers of children by international standards (Janes, 2021). Relatedly, the ONS (2023) has suggested that 'of the minority of young people imprisoned by the age of 24, most are known to police before the age of 16' adding that 'more than half (52.5%) of young adults who received immediate custodial sentences had been persistently absent during schooling' (ONS, 2023; Online). Normative approaches to school discipline tend to revolve around practices of separation, ranging from temporary removal from class to permanent school exclusion (Golding, 2021). Examples of children with SEND and mental health diagnoses receiving sanctions involving isolation for periods extending over a month have been reported in the media in recent years (Perraudin, 2019).

Such responses are based on a rational management strategy focused on respite and the 'greater good' of the whole class. However, as pointed out by Irby (2014), 'overly punitive (i.e. deep) discipline nets ... .alienate children from academic curriculum and erode the moral authority of schools' (529), resulting in a negative overall impact on social outcomes of which the school to prison pipeline is the most deleterious of all. In addition, the narrow focus on school rules results in the real reasons for misbehaviour being missed, can cause a worsening of student's behaviour, and does not provide students with opportunities to learn (Kupchik, 2010).

However, restorative approaches for problematic behaviour, whether of a criminal nature or within the context of behaviour management in schools, are strongly undermined by right-wing politics and the populist press where '"goodies for baddies" is hard to sell' (Parsons, 2005, p. 192) and often seen as a soft option (Hibbin & Warin, 2021; Warin & Hibbin, 2016, 2020). This is most notably the case in countries such as the UK where 'conservative political environments and their liberal welfare regimes ... most readily give rise to a moral underclass discourse for understanding disaffection, school drop-out, crime and other social ills' (Parsons, 2005, pp. 194–195). Parsons (2005) goes on to position this 'demonising and pathologising tendency' (Ibid.) as being central in allowing either neglectful or punitive responses in relation to school exclusion. As a result, it becomes pertinent to consider what alternatives to the traditional models of exclusionary behaviour management, might be most effective in challenging the will to punish children and young people, in a manner that instils high levels of accountability and avoids accusations of being a soft option for children and young people who have failed to meet behavioural expectations.

Relational responsibility

The account of RA from which RR derives (McNamee & Gergen, 1999) stresses that 'each individual is responsible for his or her own actions, ***but not in isolation***' (Wilson & Wilson, 1998, p. 157). This stands as an alternative to the more familiar individualist accounts of responsibility; as suggested by McNamee and Gergen (1999) 'courts of law allocate individual blame while remaining blind to the broader social processes in which crime is embedded' (p.9). In contrast, RR blurs the 'boundary between self and other' and suggests that 'there are no independent selves; we are each constituted by others (who are themselves similarly constituted)' (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, pp. 11–12). Consequently, RR can be understood in terms of dialogic ways of thinking, talking and interacting that attempt to shift discourses away from individualized notions of right or wrong, praise and blame, to more conjoined ways of making meaning and sharing the responsibility for complex social behaviour.

This line of thought ties in with ideas forwarded by Cooley (1922) and Mead (1924), who suggested, respectively, that the self comes into being through incorporating the other through processes of social imitation and role-taking. Similarly, Vygotskian theories of social learning emphasise the centrality of language and speech to thought and psychosocial development (Vygotsky, 1962), through social interaction with peers and more knowledgeable others. As such, the 'social structure of personality' (Vygotsky, 1991) is emphasised, reinforcing the idea of RR as an inherently dialogic process:

> 'Meaningful language is generated within processes of relationship . . . .the tradition of individual responsibility—in which single individuals are held blameworthy for untoward events—has a chilling effect on relationships. It typically isolates and alienates and ultimately invites the eradication of the other—a step toward non meaning'. (McNamee & Gergen, 1999; p. *xi*)

RP and coaching

The description of RR's transformative functions (McNamee & Gergen, 1999) resonates with the aims of RP (Green et al., 2013) and its close Criminal Justice System cousin Restorative Justice (RJ; Braithwaite, 1989), both of which emphasise restoration and the reparation of harms. Based on the six principles of restoration, voluntarism, impartiality, safety, accessibility and empowerment (RJC, 2023), RP has been defined as a preventative and solution-focused approach emphasising the restoration of relationships through effective, open and positive communication (RJC, 2023). The literature on RP is vast and expanding, in terms of both its impact and growing use (González et al., 2019). Organisationally, RP has been linked to the reduction of punitive practices in school (Morrison &

Vaandering, 2012) and improved school climate (González, 2012). Individual impacts have been documented from improved conflict resolution skills (Penny, 2015), to improved academic performance (Armour, 2015) and social emotional learning (Schumacher, 2014).

In terms of implementation, the use of RP in schools has rapidly expanded since the 1990s. While it is difficult to find current definitive figures on the use of RP across the UK, a national US survey conducted by González et al. (2019) found that more than half the schools in the District of Columbia were in some stage of implementing RP, and it is likely that a similar situation exists in a UK context, based on past research (Thompson & Smith, 2011). In contrast, this, however, is the official guidance on behaviour from the UK Government which is entirely lacking any reference to RP in the most recent guidelines (DfE, 2015). Alongside this is the latest drive to optimise behaviour through creating a culture in school based on providing a restorative meeting in a retrograde manner 'to set the terms of reintegration' (Bennett, 2017, p. 45) after a fixed-term exclusion has been imposed.

The literature on peer coaching is less well developed. It was first introduced into the academic literature by Showers and Joyce (1996) in relation to enhancing staff development, using regular weekly seminars to enable teachers to practice and embed new content, and the results showed consistent and dramatic improvements in implementation. Peer coaching has also been used with young people in foster care with mental health challenges to 'increase self-determination … and participation, as well as having a positive impact on … mental health empowerment, community engagement and overall quality of life' (Blakeslee et al., 2022, p. 2). Research on vertical tutor groups (VTGs) where students are mixed rather than differentiated by Year suggests that this kind of intervention has impacts on prosocial skills due to the ease and effectiveness with which older students can help younger ones (Blackburn, 1975) as well as VTGs 'represent[ing] the idea of a village community or extended family' (Barnard, 2010, p. 29).

Research combining RP with Coaching includes Schumacher's (2014) 2-year ethnographic study of weekly talking circles with adolescent girls in a public urban high school that 'met between 15 to 33 times each, for a total of 257 hrs' (Schumacher, 2014, p. 3). This study illustrated how restorative approaches through Coaching 'provided a safe space for peers helping peers … [improving] … listening, anger management, and empathic skills, which led to greater self-efficacy' (Ibid., p. 1).

Methodology

Design

'Embedding RP In School' (Warin & Hibbin, 2020) was a national evaluation study that aimed to explore pockets of good practice in RP, to capture the ways

that schools can sustain RP over time. In total, nine school settings were recruited to the study through purposive sampling:

- Four Primary Mainstreams
- Two Secondary Mainstreams
- One Specialist SEN College
- One SEND Academy
- One Pupil Referral Unit

The settings had varying levels of experience in RP, and Auden Downs (pseudonym) – a secondary mainstream that is the focus of this analysis – was among the top three schools identified by the research in terms of embedded practice, with 7 years' experience with RP and 14 years' experience delivering Coaching across school. This school had come to the attention of the research team during the recruitment process that involved contacting a range of stakeholders with expertise in RP, to find settings that might be interested in participation. Auden Downs was identified as a school with a strong national reputation for the kind of whole-school practice that was of interest to the study, and the school wanted to understand how they could enhance their practice through a research-focused approach. The school was strong in undertaking in-house training in RP and small group peer Coaching using a VTG structure (Barnard, 2022), alongside providing external training and support to other schools in Coaching and RP.

A democratic partnership approach to research participation was taken, with a bespoke system of evaluation – RUFDATA (Reasons and purposes, Uses, Foci, Data, Audience, Timing, Agency; Saunders, 2000) – being utilised to identify the focus in each school. For Auden Downs this focus was the impact of CGs on whole-school RP. Data collection was through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with senior leaders, mainstream class teachers, pupils and parents. Interview questions centred on: staff training; staff perceptions of Coaching and RP; behaviour management strategies; the school exclusion policy; the impact of Coaching and RP; the role of leadership; communication strategies; and parental engagement.

Ethics for the project was granted by Lancaster University Ethics Committee, and informed consent was gained from research participants. All data were de-identified including the school name, and role names were utilised rather than assigned pseudonyms. All data was stored securely on a password protected server in line with GDPR (2018).

Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data has been undertaken using Constructivist

Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) which advocates a data-led and iterative method of constant comparison between findings and stages of data collection. NVivo qualitative data software was used to analyse the data set through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Extensive use of memoing was utilised throughout the data collection-analysis phase, based on the superordinate categories of how schools implement, embed and sustain RP on a whole-school basis.

An explicit part of the data analysis had been to understand the implementation of RP in schools through prevention and pro-social forms of engagement in school (McCluskey et al., 2008), moving away from its roots within RJ as a form of conflict resolution (Braithwaite, 1989; Zehr, 1990).

Findings

The fertile ground in Auden Downs was the use of RP through Coaching that constituted a whole-school approach to behaviour management, relational support and pro-social skill development. Coaching Groups (CGs) were vertically structured groups of 8–10 that pupils joined and remained in for the duration of their time in school. As well as being part of the same small group of peers, pupils kept the same Coach, who could be a member of the teaching, pastoral, management or administrative staff-base.

The data revealed three core and interconnected themes relating to RR that will be further presented in this analysis: High Challenge, High Support; Diverse Family Circles; and Horizontal Systems of Discipline.

High challenge, high support

The first theme of 'high challenge, high support' related to the idea that to improve behaviour across school, it was important to 'put the challenge in first' (Senior Leadership) before supplying the necessary support. As suggested by the Head, this allowed the school 'to work within … the Social Discipline Window – the language is very specific … not doing **to** them, it's not doing **for** them. So, by working **with** each other…' (Ibid). Inherent to the approach was a skills-based ethos – for both students and adults – where everyone was trained in RP. In addition, both teaching and non-teaching staff were expected to gain a working skillset in Coaching due to the 'universal offer' that utilised the whole workforce for the delivery of the CGs, allowing 'the level of complexity … held within the organisation [to be] incredibly high' (Coaching Lead):

> … the skill level – I don't know if [the Coaching Co-ordinator] showed you the Coaching Rubric … you compare it to a role profile of a form tutor in school, and there is no comparison. (Coaching Lead)

For the adults, this skills-focused ethos was observed through the responsibility to 'make judgement calls … .exercise discernment and … .get it right' (Coaching Lead) as well as control their own emotional behaviour:

> I think one of the things that we're aware of is that in order to work in a relational restorative way it actually places quite a high demand on the adults to be self-regulating and to have quite high levels of awareness around the way in which they respond and the … things that can trigger them … (Parent)

Support in learning the skills for Coaching and RP was provided for staff members through extensive training and observation via the 'open-door nature to the classrooms … [with] learning walks and drop-ins' (Coaching Co-ordinator) for both established and new staff members. In addition, staff circle leads were 'trained to facilitate staff circles where practice was reflected on and good practice shared, modelled and developed, to set the conditions effective professional learning' (Coaching Lead). Whole-school practice where staff members had their own weekly CGs for wellbeing and peer support helped to further embed a cultural ethos across school:

> And what I really like as well is that the coaching circles extend not just to the kids but the staff as well … .the kids go in later on a Monday, so the staff go in and do their own circle before the kids go in. … This is taken very seriously. (Parent)

As a result, Coaching ability was framed as being a tacit skill that individuals learnt through practice and active engagement, resulting in the perception that 'a lot of the skills that the staff have they don't know that they are skills, they don't know they are experts' (Coaching Lead). In addition, the high challenge was mollified by a sense of people being on a learning journey in Coaching where they were 'supported to get it right and actually getting it wrong happens, and that's okay' (Coaching Lead). Students were given a similar level of training in RP, having opportunities to become RP Reps to support relational practice across the school, and Assistant Coaches within their own CGs if they showed the propensity:

> So, everybody in Year 7, gets an introduction to restorative practices, when they first arrive … So, it'll be 30 kids at a time … with a couple of members of staff … . around why circles are important to us as a school, how to respond in circles how to behave in circles. Less about behaviour really and more about engagement … And then from that, a group of those pupils will be given the opportunity go into the full RP training, which is available to Year 8s and above … approximately 300 Kids currently … have been to the higher level … (where) they become RP Reps … (Coaching Co-Ordinator)

Ultimately, this approach was seen to provide students with the 'skills for life' (Teacher) that enabled them to manage the complexities of relationships through enhancing their expressive and dialogical ability:

> . . . you're going to come across people in life, you don't always get on with . . . that will wind you up in different ways. But it's . . . giving them the skills to be able to cope with that or to verbalize that. . .we try to upskill the children and the staff and the parents, actually, that if you've got a problem or an issue . . . it's about having that open, transparent communication. (Teacher)

This resulted in an emphasis on relational repair over separation when things went wrong and relationships broke down; as suggested by one Student "you can't go to their Coaching Group and go 'these people have had a falling out, stick 'em in a separate room to rebuild the relationship' – it doesn't do that, you've had a falling out with someone, go make it up."

Diverse family circles

The family structure and exposure to diversity provided by Coaching, was intrinsic to the way RP was implemented and delivered across school, linking-in with safeguarding in fundamental ways; as suggested by the Coaching Lead, 'for some children it's not just providing a secure base within the organisation, it's providing a secure base for their lives.' This level of security was a function of the vertical structure, where students joined in Year 7 and remained until Year 12 providing a degree of consistency over time. In addition, exposure to a variety of age ranges enabled younger students to feel more secure with older students, as well as providing older students with a degree of responsibility for younger peers:

> I like how I feel safer around my Coaching Group . . . some Yr 11 kids, they're quite intimidating . . . but I've got Yr 11's in my Coaching and I know I can trust them . . . and get used to the other year 11's and it just helps to feel safe. . . (Student)

> So, I know some of my older pupils if they see one of the younger ones outside the lessons will say 'what you playing at, why are you being sent out' . . . trying to make the older ones be leaders in the group they take that on board . . . as they feel - almost a sense of responsibility . . . (Teacher)

As well as breaking down the traditional stratifications between years, Coaching also disrupted more demographically defined social boundaries:

> . . . there are children in Coaching Groups who would not be friends . . . . they could be different parts of the same postcode socially, economically. . .one of your Coachees is there deliberately because she's then exposed to a bunch of children that she wouldn't be exposed to socially . . . And that was a deliberate choice . . . it levels the playing field. (Teacher)

This deliberate exposure to diversity was a function of the complex process that surrounded group composition that the Coaching Co-ordinator described as 'a really big thought process' that took into account student

interests and backgrounds in order to create 'a proper blending across the school' (Coaching Co-ordinator). Within this diverse mix, familiarity within the context of Coaching was supported through consistent contact where CGs met three times a week: on a Monday morning to 'Check-in' (30 minutes) at the start of the week; 'Coaching Plus' (45 minutes) on a Wednesday where two different CGs discussed a topic based on Citizenship or Personal, Social Health and Economic education; and a Friday afternoon 'Check-out' (45 minutes) that was a non-directed session where groups were 'encouraged to do either community building activities or you might do some group reading … chat … play some board games…' (Coaching Co-ordinator) as a wind-down to the weekend. This proximity over time created a trusting environment that resulted in higher levels of disclosure on account of the relational nature of the groups:

> [Coaching] is delivered in a very trusting environment where the children are more likely to engage and have more frank and informative discussions … children will disclose things that make you shudder. But they're disclosing in front of their Coaching Groups … they do so because they feel that they're their family and with that they get a disproportionate level of support.. (Senior Leadership)

Horizontal systems of discipline

Alongside higher levels of disclosure and safeguarding, familiarity within the context of Coaching enabled non-hierarchical forms of discipline to develop within school:

> It's a non-hierarchical structure because everybody does it … and although there are definitely teachers who will default to more hierarchical behaviours … the Coaching acts as almost a constant plumbline … (Coaching Lead)

This resulted in the traditional tools of discipline and authority being subverted to accommodate a relational basis for repair, where the locus of authority became the individual who knew the child best rather than the traditional model of hierarchical seniority within specific disciplinary roles:

> … you could probably argue that there was an individualized seniority … So, if I know child x is having issues with something, then instead of going to the Head of Department or Head of Year, I'd go to their Coach. Because the likelihood is that Coach will know … the relationship with me as their Head of Year - they see me as … authority or in trouble, whereas the Coach has a much more laid-back relationship … (Head of Year)

As a result, there was a sense of the sanction having a different impact when there was 'a real trusting relationship' (Teacher) where the boundary was still there and 'the red line is still the red line, but how you show them the red line, is

different' (Head of Year). There was also an emphasis on following up after a student fell short of expectations, to 'make sure it's dealt with by the right member of staff' (Coaching Co-ordinator) by finding the individual who was best placed to deliver a sanction if required. As a result, 'positive sanctions' in the context of RP were seen to emphasise working through problems and unpicking issues that arose to encourage perseverance, repair and expected behaviour within a community context:

> It's like "what's going on, this has been fed back to me . . . why is this happening?". . . And so even though we're using the word sanction, actually you might sit and watch a conversation happening and think okay, that's not what we traditionally think of as a sanction . . . .because it's that restorative conversation . . . so actually I'm pulling you up because that's not what we expect . . . that's not part of how we work as a community. (Teacher)

> It's the concept of normally if you did something wrong the teacher would shout at you and that would make it worse, but in our school what they do is the teacher gets down onto a deeper level and speaks to you about why you did it. (Student)

The sanctions that students encountered were bespoke and contextualised, and they contributed to the sense of community felt throughout the school, where buy-in to expected standards of behaviour was emphasised over a compliance model of school discipline:

> . . . and it requires the teachers to become experts. Not to rely on a compliance model . . . It's a relational model so it requires the teachers to know their children well. . .understand that children behave differently and don't necessarily respond to one-size-fits-all. So, the pressure is on the . . . whole staff to be adaptable and flexible and intelligent and clever and plan . . . instead of dumbing it down to this sanction approach which of course reduces the pressure on the teachers to engage properly. (Head)

The combination of expertise and collectivity, where everyone was expected to take responsibility for behaviour, was further reinforced by a subversion of traditional hierarchies of ability where RP Reps were not chosen from 'any kind of specific type or cohort of kid' beyond who is 'the right RP Rep to go out there and deal with this one' (Coaching Co-ordinator). This loops back to the high challenge, high support environment where everyone participated in RP, freeing up teachers to teach and encouraging students to have 'corridor conversations' with fellow students, allowing them to take responsibility for the behaviour of their peers and develop their own ability in RP at the same time:

> But one of the things that we have in school - passengers into crew - is about the children being part of what we do, so things like Assistant Coach and RP Reps . . . rather than being teacher/pupil, it's about us working together. (Teacher)

> So the kids tend to . . . like the opportunity of going on the corridor because they can have a proper moan to the RP Rep if they feel that way. But then the RP Rep will

> hopefully use enough of their skills to at least reflect properly . . . .They'll go through their training, and they'll come back in and say – Miss, I think it's probably appropriate if you go and speak to them or I think they're ready to come back in the room now . . . the teacher will trust that . . . (Coaching Co-ordinator)

Such corridor conversations were seen by pupils as allowing teaching to continue, but also being preferable to being dealt with by an adult where there was a sense of feeling 'more comfortable talking to someone in your own class that you know' (Student).

Limitations

A limitation of the approach taken at Auden Downs was its resource-intensive nature where it was understood to be 'the long way around, and the hard way around . . . it's a lot of time and effort' (Teacher). As was noted by the Coaching Lead, teachers still sometimes defaulted 'to more hierarchical behaviours' when capacity to engage with a relational and restorative approach was reduced. But while it was clear that 'there was no standard practice' (Coaching Lead) across the board, there was also a more prevalent will to engage in RP through Coaching, because teachers felt that it worked:

> . . . it's the right impact for the children and that's why people are willing to do it, because you see better results. (Teacher)

In addition, Teachers reported students not always getting along in Coaching, which one Teacher who was new to the role described as being 'quite uncomfortable for me' due to her group's dislike of another Coach in Coaching Plus. This new member of staff with comparatively little experience of dealing with discord between groups suggested that she coped with the discomfort by 'just trying to focus on the positives' and 'moving it forward [through] problem solving circles' (Teacher) with other trusted members of staff, in a solution-focused way:

> I know other schools where you would have those trusted people, but that might not necessarily be for a solution - here I would say you speak to people who might be more solution-focused. Whereas I think in other schools sometimes, you speak to other people to get it off your chest, it's more of a bitching session . . . (Teacher)

Perhaps the biggest limitation was in relation to one teacher reporting that he was aware of two cases of young carers who were unknown to the school, which clearly represented a breakdown in communication in terms of the core school ethos of knowing the child:

Teacher 1: But it's, you know, there's been at least, at least two cases of me finding out that a child has been a young carer, and nobody else's in school has known.

Teacher 2: But then that's where communication comes in . . . .and not holding that yourself just saying that do we do we know this is the case because sometimes you don't know . . .

Teacher 1: And that is born out of the relationship that you have with that child . . . But my point being is that that could have been the case for it was the case for one of the children for about six months. He hadn't been to anyone.

Despite the strength of the approach, cases of vulnerability sometimes fell through the cracks of an imperfect system that took considerable time, effort and commitment to work.

Discussion

At the time of writing, there is no prior research on the vertically structured and socially diverse CGs that were observed in Auden Downs during the Embedding RP in Schools project (Warin & Hibbin, 2020) on which this paper is based. The three themes of High Challenge – High Support, Diverse Family Circles and Horizontal Systems of Discipline collectively delineate the system of whole school RP through Coaching in Auden Downs that has been previously described as a 'Distributed Network of Relational Accountability' (DNRA; Warin & Hibbin, 2020). This distributed network fell within the Social Discipline Window (Wachtel, 2013) that has been defined as:

> . . . four basic approaches to maintaining social norms and behavioral boundaries . . . represented as different combinations of high or low control and high or low support. The restorative domain combines both high control and high support and is characterized by doing things **with** people, rather than **to** them or **for** them. (p.3)

Auden Downs recognised the Social Discipline Window (Wachtel, 2013) as the theoretical basis of their approach, emphasising their high level of expertise where they were 'working at a pitch and depth that we haven't found anywhere else' (Senior Leadership). This notion of 'doing things ***with*** people, rather than *to* them or *for* them' (Wachtel, 2013, p. 3) permeated their internal communications where they had 'that same language, that same set of expectations, high challenge, high support, engage explain expect . . . build community, maintain community, repair community' (Head). It had also diffused into the home context where parents described the 'sense of collaboration and working *with*' (Parent) that was apparent in their dealings with the school.

As suggested by Blood and Thorsborne (2005) 'developing a common language around RP is one of the most recognisable aspects of any organisation's culture' in terms of 'the language used by management and staff about their

work, their clients (students and parents) and each other' (p.10). Auden Downs had managed to not only develop a common language within school but they had managed to transmit that language and knowledge of Coaching and RP to the home context observed through parental understandings of the approach being used in school. The transmission and transferability of important aspects of psychosocial provision has been highlighted as an essential ingredient for minimising risk (Hartas, 2008) as well as being a process that relates to the wider school ethos and patterns of communication (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2007). This was an element of the initial study on Embedding RP In School (Warin & Hibbin, 2020) that was directly explored, where transferability as a 'socio-cultural measure of success' was seen in settings with high levels of embeddedness of RP, where pro-social practice 'would "ripple out" to others in the community in a natural manner' (p.17).

The combination of pupils' and staff members' practical ability in RP; parental engagement; and the diverse family circles where traditional age and social boundaries were broken down seemed to result in a school setting that was 'weakly classified' (Markham & Aveyard, 2003). The concept of weak classification has been outlined as the kind of regulatory structure within school that is most supportive of essential capacities linked to student wellbeing, practical reasoning and individual responsibility for learning, contrasting with stronger school classification where teaching 'is primarily didactic and teacher-led' (Markham & Aveyard, 2003, p. 1216):

> . . . weakly classified schools promote pupils' capacity for practical reasoning by weakening boundaries between teachers and pupils . . . [facilitating] the realisation of the capacity for affiliation, especially amongst pupils, who in other schools would be 'alienated' or 'detached.' (ibid; p.1217)

With the 'passengers to crew' (Teacher) analogy, students at Auden Downs moved from identities that were comparatively passive in terms of RP delivery, to becoming more actively involved over time, through layered training opportunities in RP and Coaching. This promotion of students' 'practical capacities for reasoning' (Markham & Aveyard, 2003, p. 1209) in the skills of RP, links to research on cognitive apprenticeships (Collins et al., 1989) and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) where 'tasks that are given to the apprenticing learner are within the reach of the learner's current ability level or zone of proximal development' (Dennen & Burner, 2008, p. 426). The rationale for this was to a large extent a practical necessity of working with high levels of need within a highly preventative model (McCluskey et al., 2008); as suggested by the Coaching Lead 'the decision to orient the system towards prevention is also about finances . . . it's cheaper then employing a team of expert restorative mediators, because actually you're dealing with it much lower down.' Such an approach based on prevention and prosocial skill development (McCluskey et al., 2008) where students are delivering the RP themselves, clearly requires buy-in from those

students to engage. This in turn upholds the idea of regulatory school orders that support 'committed' pupils (Bernstein, 1975) who 'understand the methods of the instructional order, can meet its demands' and 'are empathetic with, and committed to, the aims and values' (Markham & Aveyard, 2003, p. 1213) of the school.

While the buy-in to this collaborative, preventative and skills-based approach provided the capacity for RP across school, it was familiarity within diverse family circles that allowed a sense of collective responsibility (McNamee & Gergen, 1999) to flourish. This familiarity within CGs worked on different levels, through: perceptions of safety; exposure to diversity and competing worldviews; and staff member's familiarity with their Coachees. The sense of safety enabled increased disclosure within Coaching which tied into safeguarding in fundamental ways. In addition, exposure to diversity fed into students' perspective-taking ability that is a fundamental part of the ability to mentalise and empathise with others (Gordon, 1991). As suggested by the Coaching Lead, 'the experience in the Coaching Group is it creates a model of what it looks like to get on with … a diverse group of people.' Importantly, diversity here does not simply mean 'exposure to different people in the same room' (Coaching Lead), as might be the case with other models of VTGs. Rather, it means setting the conditions for diversity to be acknowledged, supported and embraced through the 'really big thought process' (Coaching Co-ordinator) that went into CG composition. A discussion of this is beyond the remit of this analysis but will be explored in a future paper discussing bell hooks in relation to the use of RP through Coaching in school (Hibbin; In Press).

Perhaps most importantly to this discussion, the requirement of staff members to actively 'know their children well, know them in detail' (Senior Leadership) enabled relationships to flourish that allowed sanctions to be experienced differently and delivered equitably according to individual need. This translated to the way behaviour was viewed, not as something to be simply managed as seen in traditional disciplinary systems (Golding, 2021) but rather as a learning opportunity that enabled meaningful personal growth and development of the whole child. While the literature on the behaviouralist account of motivation is beyond this paper's remit (for a review see Payne, 2015) it is suggested that arguments about the benefits of sanctions versus rewards fall short of the mark when it comes to understanding the most effective ways of responding to challenging behaviour. Simply put, sanctions are not necessarily the problem – indeed children need boundaries to be taught the how's and why's of acceptable and expected behaviour within a whole-school community. Rather, it is the blunt tool of broad-brush, de-individualised behaviour policies based on an inequitable application of discipline that is questioned. In contrast, Auden Downs was able to deviate from individualised notions of right or wrong, to more

conjoined ways of sharing the responsibility for complex social behaviour. As suggested by McNamee and Gergen (1999):

> Blaming another person for his or her wrong-doing is only one possible conversational move. Attention is invited here to the process of relating within which the fact of wrong-doing comes into existence. This is not to shift blame to those processes (yet another "evil actor") but rather to raise questions about how certain actions become viable and intelligible within particular relational forms. The by-product of such inquiry may be the opening of new lines of action, new ways of framing events, and a new way of relating. . .. (p.23)

The result was an inclusive approach that moved away from the practices of separation and exclusion that can so easily predominate in school (Golding, 2021) to one where relational repair was prioritised, upholding RR's position that 'to despair of a relationship because of failures in understanding, in achieving mutual agreement, or running smoothly is, to a degree, unwarranted' (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p. 24). This is because RR encourages us to see that 'not every fault demands a culprit' due to the idea that good understandings are 'partial . . . precariously situated' (Ibid.) on account of the complex and diverse backgrounds from which we are all operating. When this is fully understood, it becomes clear that 'smooth interchange is often just the result of habit' (Ibid.), which ultimately was the core aim of the CGs; to provide a prosocial environment where those good habits could be instilled and practiced over time.

The reframing of blame also took place through a levelling of the disciplinary system where both students and staff members were equipped to deliver restorative approaches across school. Such non-hierarchical effects have been previously associated with RP by González et al. (2019) who suggest that the whole-school model in particular 'democratizes restorative justice as students assume lead roles as practitioners, a departure from the dominant model in schools where restorative approaches are developed and led by adults' (p.207). This shift towards democratic methods of managing behaviour was also realised through individual Coaches being encouraged 'to resolve that conflict . . . rather than sending them to more senior staff' (Teacher), resulting from the understanding that it was the student's Coach who was best placed to really *know* that individual, the reasons behind the behaviour, and the best way of equitably managing issues when they arose. It was these two elements that were the cornerstones of the Distributed Network of Relational Accountability (DNRA; Warin & Hibbin, 2020) that delivered RP *through* Coaching at Auden Downs; as suggested by the Coaching Lead '. . . the reason Restorative Practice works, the reason it's so well embedded, is because we do Coaching.'

The approach was not without its limitations, and the time-consuming nature of RP through Coaching was noted in participant responses. As suggested by Skiba (2000), zero tolerance systems of behaviour management that apply equal

and uncompromising fairness to all students are prevalent *because* they are easy to understand and apply, reducing both cognitive and emotional labour for teaching staff. In contrast, taking an individualised and non-hierarchical approach where staff get to know students well take responsibility for delivering RP and challenge themselves in learning new skillsets, takes time, effort and persistence.

Participants also reported some students falling through the cracks of a system that was designed to identify need, specifically in relation to young carers who had not been determined in a timely manner. This appears to be a common theme in the literature with a lack of self-identification amongst young carers (Smyth et al., 2011) and an unwillingness to come forward about their status and vulnerable situation (Warhurst et al., 2022). As suggested by Untas et al. (2022), the most effective 'enabler of identification' of young carers, is through 'trust relationships between the school, the pupil, and the parents' (p.2). Arguably the approach taken in Auden Downs was one that positioned the establishment of trust relationships at the core of its approach, making important inroads into the effective identification of vulnerability in the students that were under their care.

Conclusion

McNamee and Gergen's (1999) exploration of RR poses the question '[w]hat happens to our lives when we embrace a view of agency and self within relationship?' (Gergen, 2011, p. 82). In Auden Downs, relationship was at the centre of the way behaviour was managed in school, using RP within the context of a secure family base in Coaching. The CG operated as a direct plumbline *back* to pro-social skills, as the site where RP could be tacitly modelled and rehearsed by both staff and students. In addition, the democratization of the disciplinary system based upon discernment and knowing the child further strengthened the collective responsibility for behaviour *through* relationship. Part of this commitment to community included an obligation to not shy away from difficult behaviour through zero tolerance policies (Skiba, 2000) and to eschew traditional disciplinary tools of separation and exclusion (Golding, 2021), to genuinely unpick conflicts to understand why different behaviours arose through open, transparent communication. This was not a simple road; it placed a high demand on the adults and took time and effort in terms of planning and implementation. But the value and commitment to behaviour management through relationship across the whole school community was clear.

The two elements that most effectively capture the approach taken at Auden Downs, were the relationships formed within Coaching, and the skills acquired in RP. As suggested by one Teacher 'the sanction comes across differently when you have a different relationship.' This was RR in action,

where blame was literally reframed to ensure that behaviour was addressed in an equitable and informed manner in the context of community, where everybody took responsibility through a Distributed Network of Relational Accountability (Warin & Hibbin, 2020) alongside a whole school ethos of care (Warin, 2017). This approach took commitment and work. But the effort paid dividends over time to enable the school to go from firefighting and high levels of behaviour management to a collective ethos where everyone took responsibility for behaviour and knowing the child become the basis for all action in school.

It is suggested that the kind of whole-school practice that has been described here, fosters commitment (Bernstein's, 1975) within a weakly classified school (Markham & Aveyard's, 2003) promoting 'proactive and co-creative decision-making processes between all school members' (Lodi et al., 2021, p. 13), ultimately leading to better RP. In addition, the community created through exposure to diversity within the secure family base of the CGs is the vehicle for moving away from an individualist account of responsibility (McNamee & Gergen, 1999) to one where accountability for behaviour can be more collectively determined. As eloquently suggested by one student:

> The school is a community and I feel that every Coaching Group is one tiny community, like a lot of people say family and things like that, but I think it is a community because communities are meant to be diverse … and altogether we create a world.

If we are at all interested in reorienting our school systems to ones where diversity, tolerance and prosocial skills are prioritised over compliance models that reduce sanctions to a dumbed-down and facile approach, the use of RP through Coaching might be a very good place to start.

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