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## **‘A person is a person because of others’: challenges to meanings of discipline in South African and UK schools**

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**ABSTRACT** In this article the authors consider current understandings of discipline in schools in the United Kingdom and South Africa. The concern is with exploring the discipline/punishment/power nexus in education in both countries; with how reductionist versions of discipline as authoritarianism interweave with views about the aims and perceived need for punishment in schools, and how this is driven by perceptions of a need to maintain control or power over young people, often viewed as a ‘generation of suspects’. The authors argue that a restorative approach can be used to build more inclusive school communities where staff and students negotiate new meanings of discipline and power. Some of the key challenges associated with a restorative approach are then explored in detail and the notion of ubuntu – ‘A person is a person because of others’ – strongly associated with the new South Africa and its reassertion of traditional principles and values, is suggested as a useful compass for future development in both countries. In very different contexts, but facing many of the same challenges, the authors ask: What can the United Kingdom learn from South Africa and what can South Africa learn from the United Kingdom?

### **Background**

There has been growing international concern in recent decades about indiscipline, disruption and disaffection among unruly school students. Rates of expulsion from school continue to rise, while governments, both national and regional, intensify their search for effective and lasting solutions. Often the pressure for education authorities to be effective, and to be seen to be effective, has led to reliance on ‘positive discipline’, ‘assertive discipline’ (Canter & Canter, 1992) or zero tolerance (Henault, 2001).

At the same time, however, there has also been a significant international shift in the ways that discipline is understood in some educational settings. Some schools in the United Kingdom, and Scottish schools in particular, have begun to take a lead from developments in restorative justice and from traditional approaches to conflict resolution within indigenous Maori, Australian Aboriginal and Canadian First Nations communities. These approaches are often called ‘restorative approaches’ (RAs). In a restorative school, misconduct is viewed not simply as rule breaking and a violation of the institution of school, but primarily as a violation of people and the relationships in the school and wider community. The emphasis, then, is firstly on building a school culture in which such violation or conflict is less likely to occur and, secondly, building an ethos where, when conflict occurs, those involved have the opportunity to identify the harm done, make reparation and rebuild the broken relationship (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). Developing research and international practice (Drewery, 2004; Bitel, 2005; Blood, 2005; Kane et al, 2007; Morrison, 2007; Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008) suggest that RAs can be used to build more inclusive school

communities, where different kinds of achievement are valued, and staff and students work together to build an ethos of mutual respect.

In this article, we report the findings from a small-scale preliminary investigation of the perceptions and experiences of staff in South African primary schools about discipline. The findings from this pilot study are set within the context of recent research on RAs in the United Kingdom. We acknowledge the significant differences in context between the United Kingdom and South Africa, but here seek to explore the concerns shared by teachers in these very different settings. We examine the notion of ubuntu and explore the extent to which ubuntu principles and the framework offered by RAs may help to challenge and disrupt the nexus of discipline/punishment/power relations in schools and offer a viable alternative. What can South Africa learn from the United Kingdom and what can the United Kingdom learn from South Africa?

### **Recent International Developments in Restorative Approaches in Schools**

Detailed discussion of the values, skills and practices which now frame RAs in schools in the United Kingdom has been offered elsewhere (Kane et al, 2007; McCluskey et al, 2008), but if we are to understand the impact of RAs and what they might offer in the longer term to discussion about discipline in the United Kingdom and South Africa, then it is important to consider what distinguishes them from other behaviour initiatives. In recent research (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008, p. 6), a student noted: 'It's easier to write out 10 times "I must not do this" than to go "I actually made that person feel really bad"'. There is little evidence that punishment exercises – or being asked 'to write out 10 times "I must not do this"' – provide an effective response to disruption or disaffection. Such sanctions do little to meet the need for young people to learn how to achieve their own lasting solutions to difficulties and conflicts. As the words of this student imply, the punishment exercise is an 'easy option' because it can be completed without the need to engage, reflect or be held accountable. By contrast, the statement 'I actually made that person feel really bad' holds within it some indication of a level of active self-awareness, of being able to put oneself in another's place; a central tenet of RAs.

Amid national concerns about rising indiscipline in schools and following the growth of international interest in restorative justice in the 1980s and 1990s (Collins, 1984; Bazemore & Umbreit, 1994; Strang & Braithwaite, 2001; Walgrave, 2003), and more recently in restorative justice in schools (Hopkins, 2004; Bitel, 2005), the Scottish government provided funding for the first national pilot of RAs in schools (2004-06). This pilot supported 18 schools and their three local education authorities to implement RAs and commissioned a team based at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow to carry out an evaluation of the pilot (Kane et al, 2007). In 2008, a national follow-up study was undertaken (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008). The findings were largely very positive for students, staff and school leaders. Schools reported much stronger, more positive and calmer relationships between adults and students. Links between learning and behaviour were improved and, in some cases, significant improvements in attainment rates and decline in rates of exclusion noted. Feedback from local education authority key professionals strongly supported these findings.

In earlier accounts of the implementation of RAs, many schools were found to operate in ways that emphasised the use of RAs by trained or external staff and primarily in response to a relatively narrow range of difficulties. The use of restorative 'conferencing' was common and, while levels of satisfaction with outcomes were high for those involved, it seemed that the impact on the wider school community was limited. However, the Scottish study marked a significant shift in this respect: from an emphasis on reactive, crisis-led interventions to consideration of how best to prevent conflict and strengthen relationships in general. The framework of values, skills and practices offered by RAs was often seen as fundamental to achieving this success. Schools which were most successful worked to develop the links between a number of different approaches already valued in school, including peer mediation, 'Circle Time' and social-skills programmes, as well as a consideration of the need for strong leadership and modelling and a focus on the everyday language used by staff and among students.

Some indication of the significance of this shift is found in the many comments from school staff. It was clear that, for some schools, the RA was not seen as 'yet another initiative' or a target

to be achieved before moving on to the next priority. One primary head teacher talked about it as 'not a thing to do, but a thing to be'. A high school head teacher talked of a connection between being restorative and the values inscribed on the mace of the Scottish Parliament, i.e. justice, wisdom, integrity and compassion. Another head teacher noted of the RA that: 'At first [it] was a "big thing". Now it is really part of the way we work and what we do' (p. 8). For students in general, there was often enthusiastic support for their schools where 'things have calmed down a lot' and for teachers who 'listened' and did not 'shout' (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008, p. 9).

It is this attention to personal and social growth, to an understanding of the balance between independence and interdependence, that marks the RA out as a significant alternative to the surface-level compliance required in many other discipline and behaviour management systems. It is also the source of its challenge to traditional relations between discipline and punishment, and discipline and power in school. We suggest that it seems to meet Dewey's requirement for a liberal education in that it offers participants the 'opportunity to involve [themselves] in the deepest problems of society, to acquire the knowledge, skills and ethical responsibility necessary for "reasoned participation in democratically organised publics"' (Giroux, 1992, p. 97).

In summary, then, the RA has been successful in schools in the United Kingdom and internationally because it is seen to be fair and because it provides an effective and sustainable response to deep-seated discipline problems. It attends to the important notion of subsidiarity and seems to call upon and value traditional community approaches to conflict resolution.

### **What Are the Challenges for a Restorative Approach?**

However, the introduction of RAs in schools is also highly problematic and, while it is important to note the successes, it is even more important to examine the questions these approaches raise. Encouragingly, many of the questions about RAs have been raised in training and 'recall' sessions by school staff themselves (Kane et al, 2007) as they moved from thinking of the RA as 'another tool in the discipline toolbox' to a deeper critical engagement with its values and philosophy.

The first of these key questions centres on the tension between positive discipline systems (widely used in schools in the United Kingdom) and the RA. It is widely accepted that teachers' work is highly stressful. They have often acknowledged the effect this has on their daily interactions with students. In the RA literature, some have talked about the distance between their desire to work in respectful ways with students and their own daily practice, involving punishment exercises, detention, isolation and suspension. In the Scottish research (Kane et al, 2007), one educational psychologist spoke about this punitive/retributive system as the 'default setting' for schools. It is worth noting that many staff currently working in schools grew up knowing educational systems which regularly used physical punishment. Although corporal punishment was abolished in the 1980s in the United Kingdom, its legacy is strong and a 'will to punish' (Parsons, 2005) arguably remains central to ways of working in schools.

The second key question for a wider implementation of an RA centres on the issue of traditional power relations between teacher and student. In Slee's (1995, p. 1) valuable discussion of discipline 15 years ago, he noted: 'Central to the failure of state and territory education department responses is the unproblematic acceptance of indiscipline as a student-centred problem.' He suggested that relationships in school have often been based on an understanding of discipline as control, reflecting managerial rather than educational aims and based on authoritarianism rather than ideas of 'connectedness' (Lingard et al, 2003). The evidence suggests that little has changed in these 15 years in many schools. The challenge of an RA is a challenge to this stasis.

### **A Restorative Approach/Ubuntu in South African Schools?**

We may legitimately ask what the experience of RAs in the United Kingdom can offer to schools in the very different and immensely complex context of the new South Africa. And how might the South African experience and reflection on that experience be brought to bear on work in schools in United Kingdom? The cultural, historical and political differences between the two countries are significant and should not be underestimated. However, the colonial legacy means that there are also important structural similarities in two key areas: the justice and educational systems. Our

struggles are not the same, but by attending to Giroux's (1992) notion of 'border pedagogy', our experiences may still speak meaningfully to each other.

The link between developments in restorative justice in the field of criminal justice and RAs in schools has been noted earlier. Often these links have arisen in countries such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada, where there have been deep concerns not only about rising crime levels, disproportionate incarceration rates for minority and marginalised groups, and rising indiscipline in schools, but also about 'loss of connectedness and community in modern society' (Wachtel, 2004, p. 1) or, as Odora-Hoppers (2006, p. 2) has it, a 'tense, mistrustful, and anxiety-haunted world society'.

As South Africa has emerged into its new way of being, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its three committees – the Amnesty Committee, the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee and the Human Rights Violations Committee – aimed to reduce and address past harms and conflict by recalling the notion of ubuntu, reasserting and valuing traditional knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems (Odora-Hoppers, 2002). The work of the TRC and the extent of the damage done to society by apartheid ensure that it remains perhaps the best-known international example of restorative justice. Several other countries have developed and adapted this model since then, with Northern Ireland being the most recent example in 2009.

However, it seems that there has been little or no attempt to translate this 'crucial vehicle for empowerment' (Braithwaite, 1998, p. 2) into the work of schools in South Africa. Public schools in South Africa have been coming under increasing strain in recent years as student numbers increase and systems of discipline remain almost entirely punitive. Concerns about lack of engagement, disaffection and violence in schools fill the national media, and head teachers and staff feel under increasing pressure and stress. Aware that other countries deculturated and disrupted by Western colonialism have begun to successfully address children's and young people's needs in the context of schooling, and aware, too, of an urgency about the situation in South African schools, we were keen to investigate the possibilities for change.

*'There is a problem!'*

In 2008, a small-scale preliminary investigation in two typical publicly funded township primary schools in the province of Gauteng (Pretoria) was undertaken. The schools were both working under severe pressures to expand educational provision. They were originally meant to cater for children aged 6 to 10, but now both were in the process, like many other schools nationally, of becoming schools for children aged from 6 to 13 years (in grades 1-7). One school had grade 7 students for the first time in 2008-09 while the other had built up to grade 6. Rolls were around 1000, with an average of 40-45 children in each class. In-class support for staff was rare, as was cover for absent teachers.

In-depth interviews with school principals and teaching staff as well as with voluntary organisations and non-governmental organisations working in youth justice took place. In light of the lack of readily available and reliable national data, the purpose of these interviews was to gain some understanding of the current situation with regard to discipline in schools and, from there, to explore perceptions about school discipline and staff/student relations within the context of the new South Africa. The interview questions revolved around issues of discipline and the teachers' coping strategies:

- What are your experiences about learning and discipline in your school/classroom?
- How much importance do you place on learning and discipline in your school/classroom?
- How much importance do you think the Education department/district office is placing on learning and discipline in schools/classrooms?
- What are your feelings about the abolition of corporal punishment?
- What type of training or support have you received from the government or district office?
- Are these support measures effective?
- What type of support do you think should be put in place?

From discussions with the two primary school principals it was clear that they felt that the abolition of corporal punishment had left a vacuum in schools and that teachers feel 'at a loss', with no

effective alternatives with which to encourage good behaviour. There is widespread anecdotal evidence that the use of 'the stick' continues. These principals did not view the government as supportive or able to provide effective alternatives to the old system. They talked about teachers having 'no patience', echoing the findings of Pillay (2008). They regarded indiscipline as a major concern and both expressed interest in finding a fresh approach. One also noted that although the issues were not as severe as in middle and secondary schools, there were real difficulties at times. He also commented that sometimes parents were frightened of their children as they grew older; a view expressed in later conversations with staff.

In the focus-group meetings with the teaching staff, we asked whether disruption and indiscipline were a concern. The response was emphatic: 'There is a problem!' When asked how much of the time teachers felt in control, they discussed and agreed among themselves that they felt in control around 40% of the time. One teacher talked about low-level indiscipline and how she usually responded by using isolation within the classroom or removing a toy from a learner to remind him/her of the need to behave. All reported that there were systems in place to deal with 'extreme' incidents of indiscipline, such as stealing or hitting other children. If, for example, a teacher felt that an incident was serious s/he would report it to the head of department. It might then be passed on to the principal. The principal may then refer it to the school's disciplinary committee. This committee, like all committees in school, must have representation from the school governing body, comprising parents, a teacher as well as the principal, etc. When a parent is called in to meet this committee, a form called the 'Parent and Learner Disciplinary Pledge' is signed. The child makes a promise to behave better. Although the terms may be different, many teachers in schools in the United Kingdom and elsewhere will be familiar with this or a similar system.

However, it was clear that the staff were sceptical about the effectiveness of these measures, especially with older children, and that they felt ill-equipped to deal with common low-level disruption – again, an experience that would be recognised by teachers in many other countries. Confusions about rights and responsibilities for children and for parents were obvious in these meetings. More than one teacher referred to the South African constitution and felt that the problem arose from there: 'Even to take children out of the class is against the Constitution.' Another felt that parents were also 'too worried about their rights'. This led on to a broader discussion about the role of parents, with some very critical views being expressed. These criticisms related most often to perceptions about a lack of commitment and involvement and a tendency to 'shift responsibility to school'. Parents were seen as difficult to contact and at times unwilling to come into school: 'Some parents do cooperate but not all.' One teacher noted that 'parents don't comply', while another added, albeit in a more conciliatory tone, that 'even when we call in parents it is hard to find solutions', though there was also recognition of the important issues for the many child-led households. The low socio-economic conditions in much of South Africa inevitably impact on households and families. In the pilot study, teachers cited a number of developments that aggravate efforts to address indiscipline in schools. For example, they pointed out that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS has led to an increase in the number of child-led families and orphans. In addition, they highlighted the challenges some learners have to contend with: there are many families where parents are absent as they work long hours and it falls to children to care for siblings and the home. Furthermore, teachers revealed the difficulties they faced with learners raised by grandparents. In a country where public transport is still developing and where car ownership is still very limited, it is not uncommon for parents to be unable to come home daily and for grandparents to take on the role of primary carer. It would be surprising if this disruption did not have an impact on communication between home and school. One teacher also expressed concern that parents did not help their children with their homework. It was also noted that parents of older students were less likely to engage with school. They would 'attend meetings for their children in the first years of school ... pay school fees ... cooperate', but not when the children got older.

In the focus meetings with non-governmental organisations it became clear that the situation in schools is viewed with very grave concern by some of those working in restorative justice. One worker commented that 'schools are much more punitive than the criminal justice system' and talked about the great strides made in the justice system since the introduction of majority rule in 1994. Ex-offenders who met with us talked about the need for much more work in schools to

ensure greater understanding of children's rights, the constitution, what causes crime and how it can be prevented.

### **'A person is a person because of others' – Ubuntu**

In many public arenas in the new South Africa, there has been a strong reassertion of traditional principles and values. 'A person is a person because of others' recalls the concept of ubuntu:

A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed. (Tutu, 1999)

The concept of ubuntu gains expression from the African idioms *Motho ke motho ka batho* and *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which mean 'A person is a person through other persons' or, their alternative rendering, 'I am because we are: we are because I am' (Ramose, 1999; Goduka, 2000). The concept, originating in pre-colonial African rural settings, is associated with indigenous ways of knowing and being (Swanson, 2007) and, over time, has been used in a general sense to refer to an African philosophy of life (Mokgoro, 1997). However, the notion of ubuntu is not easily definable because it cannot be assigned to a specific social context but tends to be thought of in diverse forms which depend on the context in which it is being applied (Mokgoro, 1997; Anderson, 2003; Murithi, 2006; Metz, 2007). As a result, various definitions and descriptions of ubuntu abound. These include: 'an African philosophy of humanity and community' (Skelton, 2002, p. 496); 'an African cultural world-view' (Murithi, 2006, p. 28); and '[a] philosophy of becoming human' (Swanson, 2007, p. 55). Portrayed as an elusive and multifaceted concept, ubuntu affords multiple and shifting insights into society and relationships and, as Mokgoro (1997, p. 3) argues: 'its social value will always depend on the approach and the purpose for which it is depended on'.

However, as noted above, at the core of ubuntu is the recognition of a value system that acknowledges people as social and co-dependent beings. This is an ideal which expresses the need for a basic respect and compassion for others (Louw, 2003) that promotes 'communalism and interdependence' (Mapadimeng, 2007, p. 258) and enunciates that 'all human beings are connected not only by ties of kinship but also by the bond of reciprocity rooted in the interweaving and interdependence of all humanity' (Goduka, 2000, p. 70). Ubuntu espouses those values generally associated with societal well-being, which include: consensus, reconciliation, compassion, human dignity, forgiveness, transcendence and healing (Mokgoro, 1995; Tutu, 1999). As a result, with the advent of the post-colonial and post-apartheid era, the notion of ubuntu in South Africa was extended to incorporate nation building, transformation, reconstruction, national transformation and transition into a democracy (Mbigi, 1995; Skelton, 2002; Swanson, 2007). Consequently, ubuntu principles underlie conceptions of the various sectors of the new democracy and have played a role in influencing the restructuring of a wide spectrum of government, public and economic sectors. Examples from government policies and the judiciary include: the Child Justice Bill of 2008 on juvenile justice reform, which based the rehabilitation and reintegration of children who violate the law on ubuntu principles (Skelton, 2002); the constitutional court, which adopted ubuntu values in justifying the abolition of the death penalty in 1995 (Anderson, 2003); and the TRC, as noted above, under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which incorporated the values of peacemaking in line with ubuntu principles as part of a national drive to bring about socio-political reconciliation (Ramose, 1999; Murithi, 2006; Mapadimeng, 2007).

### **What Might Be the Challenges for Ubuntu in Schools?**

As Swanson (2007, p. 59) cautions, although ubuntu advocates values that promote the collective well-being of society, the concept should not be advocated uncritically. Ubuntu principles, based on indigenous ways of knowing, might be problematic when applied in school settings because, as Nzimande (1988) warns, youths tend to view culture-based values as adult business and, as such, old-fashioned and not applicable to them. Therefore there is a need to re-examine and apply ubuntu principles more critically as an alternative approach to conflict resolution in school settings. It is important to avoid entrenching traditional adult-child relations that tend to disempower

learners and to find possible ways of empowering learners – that is, drawing in and incorporating learners' views through negotiation. Of concern is that ubuntu tends to entrench existing and unchallenged discriminatory practices based on age, gender and social standing (Mdluli, 1987). The argument is that those in positions of power tend to manipulate and abuse ubuntu principles 'to advance their narrow ends and to legitimize domination and unjust practices' (Mapadimeng, 2007, p. 263). For instance, the value of respect is abused to justify superiority based on age differences, gender and social positions (Mdluli, 1987), thus entrenching the existing societal power imbalances between men and women, adults and children, as well as class and poverty. One of the main criticisms of the TRC, for example, is that it bowed to pressure from legislative concerns and time constraints at the expense of the concerns and fears raised by individual women in particular (Chapman, 2007). This concern resonates with those articulated in other post-colonial societies. Speaking in the context of the Australian Aboriginal experience, Huggins (2007) has warned of the dangers of valorising 'tradition' for its own sake and the need to recognise the problematic nature of tradition and patriarchal societies in general. We would argue that tradition here may be able to offer a platform for change as long as it acknowledges and addresses past discrimination against women and children.

Another key criticism is that with its emphasis on values where 'the collective supersedes the individual' (Khoza, 2006, pp. xx-xxi) and which view 'the community and not the individual at the centre' (Goduka, 2000, p. 70), ubuntu tends to enforce conformity (Marx, 2002), which, in turn, reinforces and perpetuates existing imbalances in power relations between the individual and the community (Sono, 1994; Marx, 2002). The problem is that in promoting societal well-being uncritically, ubuntu enforces group solidarity at the expense of individual well-being. The objections against enforced conformity are that it tends to create an environment of repressive conformity and compulsory loyalty, which, in turn, suppresses any questioning of authority and/or resistance to domination (Mdluli, 1987, pp. 67-69). Of concern, as Sono (1994) and Louw (2003) point out, is that very often non-compliance is met with harsh punitive measures resulting in the individual being marginalised and/or disempowered as a being.

Although the values of ubuntu could be exploited to justify and entrench imbalances in power relations, as noted earlier, they can offer guidelines, opportunities and possibilities of enhancing societal well-being as confirmed by the justice system in abolishing the death penalty in South Africa. We argue that based on the principles of interdependence, consensus, reconciliation, compassion, human dignity, forgiveness, transcendence and healing, the notion of ubuntu may still offer schools useful guidelines for reducing disaffection or violence and fostering a culture where all concerned and affected individuals strive to bring about reconciliation and consensus when violations happen. Founded on the expressions 'A person is a person because of others' and 'I am because we are: we are because I am', ubuntu acknowledges the valuable input every individual in a school setting can contribute in enhancing harmony, that is, 'both the rights and responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and social wellbeing' (Louw, 2005, p. 9). While, on the one hand, ubuntu advocates collective interdependence, on the other hand, it also promotes individual independence as an equally important value. 'Ubuntu strives to incorporate both relational and distance' as well as 'both individuality and communality' (Cilliers, 2008, p. 5). While it constitutes personhood through other persons, it appreciates the fact that 'other persons' are so called precisely because 'we can ultimately never quite stand in their shoes or completely see through their eyes' (Louw, 2005, p. 6). In this respect, ubuntu values which include consensus, agreement and reconciliation embody the principles of RA (Anderson, 2003; Murithi, 2009). Both the RA and ubuntu advocate the use of cooperative efforts to address the imbalances created by an individual's conduct and aim at bringing about agreement and harmony (Anderson, 2003). Thus, as an existing and tested cultural approach to conflict resolution, ubuntu can offer useful insights and alternative ways of understanding discipline, resolving violations and conflict, as well as building an ethos of 'A person is a person because of others' in school settings.

## Discussion

Reviewing the findings from the pilot study in the context of this discussion of ubuntu and RAs in general, we are struck by similarities of perspective and experience in the United Kingdom and

South Africa. In much of the research undertaken on behaviour in schools, teachers have regularly reported feeling concerned about discipline; about how to maintain and develop effective behaviour management strategies; about how to engage with home and family, especially where there are difficulties at home; and about trying to balance the rights of the individual and the group within the classroom (Munn, 2002; Munn et al, 2004; Wilkin et al, 2006). It is particularly interesting that although corporal punishment has been abolished for longer in the United Kingdom than in South Africa and much effort has been directed to 'improving behaviour', these issues remain central to many teachers' daily professional lives.

It is clear from the research in the United Kingdom and, importantly, also in post-colonial societies across the world, that an RA can bring sustained and authentic change to relationships, learning and behaviour in schools. It may be argued that effective teachers have always been restorative, but the value of an RA seems to lie in the way that it offers a much more explicit framework of principles, skills and practices than previous initiatives. However, there is a clear challenge if we are to re-imagine or rebuild the meaning of discipline and relationships of power in schools so that those working and learning within them can recognise their communities as embodying the values of ubuntu within a framework of an RA. We suggest that there are three key aspects to this challenge in the discipline/punishment/power nexus. The first of these relates to prevalent and, we suggest, impoverished meanings of discipline, current in many schools; the second aspect relates to the 'will to punish' (Parsons, 2005); and the third is concerned with change and change processes within an educational system and structure largely unchanged since its introduction in the industrial era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Pace & Hemmings, 2007).

#### *Impoverished Meanings of Discipline?*

As we have noted earlier, there is a fundamental question about the compatibility of an RA with common extrinsic rewards/points/rewards-based systems and particular issues in relation to approaches such as assertive discipline (Canter & Canter, 1992), which emphasise teacher authority rather than teacher–student interaction and negotiation. Such systems are often welcomed by schools, with their clear, staged system of rewards and sanctions applicable to all students. However, such approaches call upon a view of the child or young person as having control over their situation and a simple power to 'choose' to be 'bad' or 'good'. This denies the importance not only of immediate individual situations but also of historical, cultural and political contexts. The most important failing of a positive discipline approach, however, may be that it only trains teachers. Power and control are vested in the teacher and the school. It removes opportunities for students to develop their own skills of conflict resolution and explore their own and others' values, and for that exploration to be part of learning in the classroom. We would suggest that, far from being an effective response to indiscipline in schools, such systems may constitute a contributing factor. Their prevalence is evidence of the 'obscuring and reassuring effect of established institutions' (Garland, 1990, p. 3). They go against the notion of connectedness and often ignore the role of families and communities in the development of children and young people as stakeholders in society.

The role of the family and community in formal education is still often a problematic issue for schools. Some of the critical comments by staff in the pilot study about parents seem to us to reflect a sense of mistrust that often seems to characterise home–school relations. Again, recognising different roots in the two countries but similar expressions of frustration and lack of effective communication, research has often revealed that many staff in schools in the United Kingdom find relationships with home equally problematic. Even in schools seen to be making very good progress in developing an RA in terms of student–student and teacher–student relations in the Scottish research, progress in work with parents was often much less well developed. Araujo (2005, p. 241) suggests that reluctance to actively engage with parents on this issue reflects a broader 'conception of indiscipline as originating at the home and predominantly in certain cultural and social backgrounds'. These concerns, explored by Slee (1995) and Gamarnikow & Green (1999) among others, provide a helpful starting point for a much needed re-examination of the relations between home and school, and of the balance of power in these relations. In this respect, ubuntu,



with its focus on collective well-being, interdependence (Goduka, 2000) and a view of the individual in terms of his/her relationship with others (Louw, 2003, p. 9), may be able to helpfully reframe discussion between home and school and build a more authentic relationship of trust and respect.

#### *The 'Will to Punish'*

Parsons (2005) talks about the 'will to punish' as a concept deeply embedded in our understandings of what is possible and what is appropriate in schools in the United Kingdom. In our search to understand and challenge this, Garland (1990, p. 16) reminds us that though punishment is a 'singular generic noun [it] is not a singular kind of entity'. The prevalence and longevity of education's commitment to punishment and sanctions demands much closer examination. Understanding the meanings and purposes of punishment is a complex but necessary part of challenging its seeming inevitability. In the United Kingdom, it is clear from exclusion statistics that the absence of corporal punishment does not equate with an absence of punitiveness. Indeed, it has been argued that increasing surveillance and control of students in many countries is indicative of an increasingly punitive turn in education (Gutting, 1994; James & James, 2001; Beger, 2002) characterised by

twice daily registration, period attendance via computer analysis, toilet passes, late slips, behaviour sheets, regular, controlled, long timed periods of work and short controlled periods of rest, lining up for classes, the control of eating and drinking in class, supervised areas of study and a common curriculum, warning bells and period bells, closed circuit television, study contracts. (McCluskey, 2005, p. 169)

In the South African context, we know that the history of apartheid upheld and supported corporal punishment as a norm. The apartheid system instituted punitive measures and laws to exert its power and allowed very little or no room for individuality and self-expression. The democratic government, after 1994, instituted a number of policies in response to the rising levels of violence and indiscipline in schools and to counter the apartheid legacy which enforced punishment as the main, if not the only, mode of discipline in schools. These include the abolition of corporal punishment under Section 10 of the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996a), which states that 'No person may administer corporal punishment at schools to a learner'. Other related legislation on corporal punishment includes Section 12 of the South African Constitution Act No. 108 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b, p. 8), which states that 'Everyone has the right not to be treated and punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way'; the National Education Policy Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996c), which states that 'No person shall administer corporal punishment or subject a student to psychological or physical abuse at any educational institution'; and guidance from the Department of Education (2000, p. 5) which aims 'to protect the child from all physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation'. However, despite new legislative measures and policies, violence and indiscipline in schools persist, and schools and teachers tend to resort to corporal punishment as their main mode of enforcing discipline (Morrell, 2000; 'Teachers Still Hitting Students', 2006; Parkes, 2008). The result is repressive conformity which not only disempowers learners but is likely to send the message that corporal punishment resolves conflicts and disagreements.

While there may be very different historical roots for a 'will to punish' in the two countries, the message to learners may be very similar. It is essential to understand the continuing influence of this mindset and discourse in schools, both British and South African, and the challenges it raises for thinking differently about discipline.

#### *Obsolete School Structures?*

The final key aspect of the challenge facing an RA is in thinking about change and change processes within an educational system and structure devised for an earlier age. The juxtaposition of such a static structure with continual interest in schools as a site of 'solution' to broader but shifting

political concerns places both teachers and students in a uniquely difficult situation. It has been calculated that in the years from 1997 to 2005 there were over 50 separate developments impacting directly on the work of schools in the UK (Chapman, 2005, p. 144). Yet, within the vast majority of secondary schools at least, the organisational form or 'grammar' (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) remains the same. There are still students sitting in chairs and teachers in front of classes; there is a common curriculum bounded by examination with teachers initiating and students responding. This highlights questions about the purposes of education per se and Dewey's (1916) notion that the 'physical and social environment of schools – more so than the content of classroom lessons – educates students into acceptable social roles and responsibilities' (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006, pp. 617-618). Thomson (2007) offers a helpful overview of ways in which to explore a necessary concern with change as both process and product, both incremental and transformative, though she makes an important point when she notes that change is itself 'a complex and unstable notion' (p. 56). However, understanding of change is essential if we wish to embed and sustain new structures of discipline and power offered by an RA. Its key principles ensure a capacity to deal with enduring social conflict at different levels and also current concerns about the fragmentation of society. We would argue that change in schools has often been dominated by relativism rather than absolutes, but that change that challenges power relations in ordinary schools is the most fundamental change of all and one likely to have the most positive creative and productive impact.

### **Conclusion**

While it is important to recognise the small-scale nature of this study in South African schools, it does present a fruitful space for reflection on recent developments in restorative approaches and school discipline in general. We have argued that the framework offered by restorative approaches and the values of ubuntu allow for interrogation of the complexity of power relations in schools and for recognition, too, of the presence of different kinds of conflict within education in ways that traditional approaches to discipline cannot. Both offer the potential for the rediscovery of much more nuanced and expansive meanings of discipline, based on respect, listening, engagement and belief in the capacity for change in teachers and students. They both challenge the prevalence of punishment as the stock response of frustrated staff, throwing into sharp relief related questions of change and change processes. We would argue that they have much to say to each other and much more to explore together. The concept of ubuntu in the traditional value system of South Africa offers a compass for exploration of current understandings of restorative approaches in both countries.

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