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Teachers are Afraid we are Stealing their Strength': A Risk Society and Restorative Approaches in School

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'Teachers are Afraid We are Stealing their Strength':

A Risk Society and Restorative Approaches in school.

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the introduction of Restorative Approaches (RA) in schools, contextualizing this within a discussion of international concerns about school safety, (in)discipline and school violence. It will explore questions about the compatibility of RA with zero tolerance and positive/assertive discipline approaches and the use of disciplinary exclusion in a 'risk society' (Beck et al. 2003; Giddens 1990).

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Introduction

This paper will discuss the introduction of Restorative Approaches (RA) in schools, contextualizing this within a discussion of international concerns about school safety, (in)discipline and school violence. It will explore questions about the compatibility of RA with zero tolerance and positive/assertive discipline approaches and the use of disciplinary exclusion in a 'risk society' (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990). It will examine the experience of schools, in relation to Garland's concern with 'the decline of the rehabilitative ideal and the re-emergence of punitive sanctions', to interrogate the pressures on schools to manage unruly behaviour where 'policies need to be seen to be tough, smart and popular with the public' (2001, p.13-14).

This paper will draw on the findings from a range of recent studies and evaluations of Restorative Approaches (RA) in the UK and will focus on two related aspects of these these research findings:

- RA and tensions with other policy and practice about discipline, and school violence in the schools studied
- The question of sustainability of this kind of school change in relation to teacher fears about loss of power and control.

The terms 'Restorative Justice', 'Restorative Practices' and 'Restorative Approaches' have come to be used in education to mean restoring good relationships when there has been conflict or harm; and developing school ethos, policies and procedures that reduce the possibilities of such conflict and harm occurring (Kane et al. 2007; Morrison 2007). Recently the term 'Restorative Approaches' has gained wider acceptance internationally, encompassing not only the practices but also the underlying philosophy, values, skills and strategies associated with RA, and therefore this term is preferred here.

Findings from recent evaluation studies indicate that RA has had a major and continuing impact on most schools where it has been introduced in the UK (Skinns, Du Rose & Hough, 2009: Transforming Conflict 2009; Lloyd & McCluskey 2008; Hull Centre for Restorative Practices 2008; Kane et al. 2007; Bitel 2004), and internationally (Wong, 2008; Burssens & Vettenburg 2006; Bazemore, 2005; Reistenburg, 2005; Marshall, Shaw & Freeman 2002; Karp & Breslin 2001; Adair & Dixon 2000). Findings indicate the RA has promoted calmer schools with a strengthened ethos and reductions in disciplinary suspension and truancy.

However, the introduction of RA has also raised some challenging questions for school staff and more broadly for schools.

***'Teachers are afraid we are stealing their strength'*: Fears that RA reduces teacher power.**
Many staff in the evaluation studies talked about difficulties reconciling their school's current behaviour management or discipline policy and practice with RA. They were often keen to see how RA could support their day-to-day work with students, but unsure about its use in more serious or complex situations. This uncertainty seemed to relate to concerns about a potential loss of control or power in the classroom;

> *There's always the risk that when the going gets tough, restorative is an easy target in any school…you've got a kind of default setting among teachers saying 'well that's all very well but we're not punitive enough, we're not scary enough. The kids aren't frightened of us'* (Staff member).

A minority had worked to develop strong and effective parent and community links or to apply a Restorative Approach to inter-staff conflict, but in general such developments were seen as much more problematic. It was perhaps understandable that schools often focused on attempts to change student behaviour through RA as this was one of the drivers for its introduction. However, by focusing primarily on this area, teachers may be blind to larger systemic or structural issues which give rise to inappropriate or disruptive behaviour. This restriction or limitation on the application of RA runs counter to one of its central premises; that the community itself is harmed when one person belonging to it is harmed or causes harm; a person is a person because of others (McCluskey & Lephalala, 2010) and that all bear some responsibility for 'restoring' that community at such times.

The central challenge of RA, we would suggest, lies here; in its contrast with the habitus of schools; with the 'taken for granted' structures and systems of discipline and control in schools (McCluskey et al. 2008) which focus only on students and the need for them to change their behaviour.

Can the questions and concerns of teachers raised in these studies help interrogate current ambiguities in educational approaches to discipline? What can the experience of those on the margins of schooling reveal about these ambiguities and tensions? Can RA help address a risk society's 'perpetual sense of crisis' (Garland 2001, p. 20)?

Background
Whilst debates about student behaviour have continued for decades internationally, recent years have seen increasing political concern about levels of exclusion from school. Public and professional fears about rising indiscipline and school violence are regularly given prominence in the media, and policy has responded by increasing its range of punitive regulatory structures and processes. However, for those uneasy with this 'punitive turn', the report of the Zero Tolerance Task Force of the American Psychological Association (APA) has provided an authoritative and convincing response (Skiba et al. 2006). Its findings examined the evidence

on six key questions: the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies, impact on students of colour and students with disabilities, developmental appropriateness for children and youth, impact on the relationship between schools and the juvenile justice system and impact on students, families and communities. Finally, it summarises effective disciplinary alternatives to the many serious failings of zero tolerance. It specifically identifies Restorative working as an effective approach to 'reducing the risk of violence or disruption' (2006, p11). It is clear that the APA Report represents a significant moment in thinking about discipline and behaviour management, and that its findings are applicable in many post-industrial societies, including the UK.

Definitions Of Violence

A risk society is often defined by its concern with fragmentation and the impact of disconnected communities and violence. Schools are seen to reflect and shape this version of society. However, the meanings of these terms shift and reconstitute over time and the meaning of 'violence' in particular has done so in the context of schools. The number of exclusions from school for reasons of violence remains very low overall (DCSF, 2009; The Scottish Government, 2009; WAG, 2009) but the popular press often presents a very different picture for the general public. Definitions of violence in school contexts have been contentious, with Brown (2005, p.64) noting that, over a ten-year period, the boundaries of what was considered as harmful behaviour expanded considerably to include new categories such as being ostracised by the social group, name-calling and 'dirty looks'. Similarly, the expansion of the term 'aggression' has been fostered by a swelling of research interest in topics such as bullying, and has necessarily entailed gender as a category for consideration (Batchelor, Burman & Brown, 2001; Burman & Batchelor, 2009; Smith & Thomas, 2000) since some forms of aggression such as 'relational aggression' and 'social aggression' have traditionally been associated with feminine behaviour. It is not the purpose of this paper to probe these varying understandings of violence per se but, rather, to point to the ways in which these shifting debates about the nature of violence are indicative of a high level of policy and public anxiety about the topic.

To address this anxiety, and as part of a national initiative (Scottish Executive, 2001), a pilot of Restorative Approaches was introduced in 2004 in 18 schools in 3 Scottish local authorities. The pilot scheme was evaluated by a team from the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. The findings were very positive, with most schools, and particularly primary schools, making significant progress in key areas of school discipline and staff and student relationships. A follow-up evaluation was conducted in 2008 by a team from the University of Edinburgh. Findings from this study and recent, more localised UK evaluations will be used here to query if and how RA might work to remedy discipline problems in schools, when school discipline is such a highly politicised issue. Two key aspects of recent research are considered here:

- Tensions between RA and other discipline policies and practices, including those related to school violence in the schools studied

- Questions of sustainability of RA in the face of teacher fears about loss of power and wider social and media pressures towards punishment.

Before opening up this discussion, the next section will briefly outline the origins and nature of RA in schools.

Restorative Approaches

RA in schools developed from Restorative Justice. There are still differing views and practices in the Restorative Justice movement, but many proponents would agree that, although developed out of practice, RJ is not limited to any particular practice but rather is defined by an underlying set of principles. Marshall (1999, p.10) describes these as:

- Making room for the personal involvement of those mainly concerned (particularly the offender and the victim, but also their families and communities)
- Seeing crime problems in their social context
- A forward-looking (or preventative) problem-solving orientation
- Flexibility of practice.

As it developed in the criminal justice system, RJ sought to provide, perhaps for the first time, a much clearer framework for restitution, in which offences could be punished but within a context where the relationship damaged by the offence was the priority, and based on the premise that this damaged relationship could and should be repaired; and that the offending individual be reintegrated for the good of that individual but also for the community as a whole.

Over time, some of those working in education, concerned about rising indiscipline and disaffection began to ask if a Restorative approach might work in schools too. They were joined by others who saw the role of school as central to making society as a whole more restorative and just (Morrison, 2007). The key ideas behind RA in schools are that:

- the school system is crucial as it is the central institution in the development and education of all its citizens,
- that personal responsibility is most likely to flourish when there is genuine opportunity to participate in communal life,
- daily interactions between staff themselves, between teacher and student, between student and student have a cumulative effect on personal and social development, and
- good relationships within schools have a positive impact on learning outcomes.

These ideas or principles have led to developments in schools across the world. In UK schools, RA has tended to feature in one of three ways. First, it appears as a whole-school, permeating approach emphasizing preventive and educational approaches at all levels, but also operating as a response to wrongdoing, conflict or when relationships have broken down. Second, RA features as a whole-school approach involving class, subject and support staff, and operating primarily as a response to wrongdoing, conflict or when relationships have broken down; and, finally, RA is constructed as a model used mainly by pastoral care, behaviour support staff and sometimes school management, as a response to wrongdoing, conflict or when relationships have broken down.

The studies considered here illustrate that schools positioned themselves at different points on a Restorative continuum.

The evaluation studies

Data collection in the first national study of RA (Kane et al. 2007) involved interviews (400 approx), surveys of school staff (627) and students (1160), observation and documentary analysis. The second national study (Lloyd & McCluskey 2008) gathered largely qualitative data though in-depth interviews and focus groups in 22 schools. Alongside the second national study there was an evaluation of RA in two very different secondary schools in one local authority. This local evaluation (Lloyd, McCluskey & Stead 2009) is explored belowin order to give some indication of how RA may be understood and experienced in the day –to- day life of schools.

The RA projects in these two schools began in autumn 2006 prior to an intended rollout across the authority. All mainstream secondary schools in the local authority were invited to tender for the project; both School A and School B were keen to take part. The two schools were seen as representing very different starting points. School A, newly formed from two merged schools, had major discipline issues. School B was seen as a well-established school with a strong, stable senior management team. School B had taken on a number of recent initiatives and was thought to be '*ready*' for RA. School A, a new school facing a number of difficulties, was seen to *'need it'*. Both schools were non-denominational 6-year comprehensive schools.

From national and the local evaluations, findings indicated that RA had a major and continuing impact on most schools involved. The strategies employed varied between schools but all the interventions can be seen on a continuum from whole school approaches to those used in more challenging situations or with individual students described earlier. School A treated RA as a specific approach to be used in sorting out difficult situations, or in responding to particular incidents where harm had been done to relationships. School B, on the other hand, favoured more permeating approaches, where the underpinning values of the school were characterised by RA. However, as noted earlier, the introduction of RA also raised some challenging questions for school staff, firstly, about the extent to which RA complemented or undermined established systems of

discipline based on retribution and secondly, about issues of sustainability of this kind of school change in the context of teacher fears about loss of power and control. We will now examine experience in these two schools in finer detail, as they offer interesting insight into current dilemmas.

RA and traditional approaches to school discipline

In School A, RA was a visible part of school policy, and given prominence in the school handbook:

> What is a Restorative Approach?
> • It focuses on the harm caused rather than the rules broken
> • It shows equal concern and commitment to all those involved
> • It supports the person harmed by giving them a chance to have a say in what
>   happens
> • It supports the person responsibly by providing an opportunity to accept
>   responsibility and make amends
> • It recognises that the school is a community and its members have a responsibility to
>   behave in a respectful manner towards each other.

The handbook then goes on to describe Restorative Conversations and Conferences. Interestingly, these are set in the context of a regular range of disciplinary sanctions from classroom isolation, through punishment exercises, detention to exclusion.

In School B, RA was not mentioned explicitly in the school handbook, reflecting an approach that sees this as part of a wider range of school support and behaviour intervention rather than as a distinctive initiative. Disciplinary sanctions ranged through 'time out', 'reflective exercises' and detention to more serious sanctions such exclusion. The focus for RA in practice in School B had been on its use with students in difficulty; either because their behaviour was challenging to school discipline or because they were seen as particularly vulnerable. RA had not been used as a response to issues between staff or between staff and families, nor was it seen widely by staff as a whole school approach to dealing with conflicts in subject classrooms. The principal of School B indicated that he saw RA '*not so much a technique, a bolt on, but more about a set of values'*. He saw it as part of the overall school approach to discipline and pastoral care, which also included solution-focused approaches. The development of RA as a visible, or explicit, part of the language of the school was not seen as helpful by the Principal. There was a concern that if the term 'RA' was used, staff with '*innovation fatigue'* would perhaps disregard not only the term but also the approach itself. He suggested that while staff might not be familiar with the term they would be familiar with the core principles of the behaviour system and that the large majority would be committed to the values associated with RA. This principal asserted the values of RA whilst simultaneously pursuing retribution as a proper response to student misdemeanours.

Contrasting approaches in School A and School B both carry risks to the successful pursuit of RA. Previous studies have shown that RAs can support 'a culture shift' (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001; Ritchie and O'Connell, 2001), generating more and better pupil participation in the school community. This highly desirable effect is not likely where RA is used only as a mechanism for responding to particular, challenging situations, as in School A, nor where it permeates but lacks clear articulation and visibility, as in School B. Methods of implementing RA in Scottish schools, and variations affecting successful implementation, have been discussed elsewhere (Kane et al., 2009). Concern here is with analysing the relationship between RA and punitive 'discipline' systems in schools.

Staff in evaluation studies referred to earlier, talked about difficulties reconciling their current behaviour management or discipline policy and practice with RA.

> *RA's still occurring in certain areas, only - difficult, as more disagreements happen in classrooms and teachers lack time/space to do the process properly* (Staff member, School A)

Although lack of time and space were identified as practical barriers to the use of RA, more serious doubts were expressed about the use of RA in complex situations. There were also suggestions that although RA brought clear benefits, it was seen as a 'soft option' at times, and that it blurred the boundaries of acceptable behaviour;

> *Generally there is more a sense of calm, but in some ways – students who seem to have no ability/want to change their behaviour 'get away' with things more than they perhaps used to.* (Staff member, School A).

In both schools, a staff survey carried out as part of the evaluation revealed strong support for the statement, *People who cause harm should be punished.* Although School A had a very different approach from School B and was much more successful at implementing and developing RA successfully, staff in both schools agreed with this statement. This, again, mirrors findings of other evaluations.

Yet RA is characterised by its emphasis on repair and restoration rather than punishment. This is not to say that sanctions are never part of a Restorative Approach, but rather that they are usually present only when agreed by all those involved to be a helpful part of the repair or restoration. For example, in one school friction with local residents was caused when students had been leaving school grounds and tipping over their rubbish bins at lunchtime. One resident had complained to the school and the culprits were soon identified. A traditional response might be to punish the student and perhaps, at best, ask him/her to write a letter of apology. In this case the resident was invited into school to meet the students in a Restorative Meeting. The process was explained in advance and she agreed to participate. All involved were given the opportunity to explain their

views and feelings. The meeting gave the local resident the opportunity to explain the distress and worry caused to her. The students explained that they had only been 'doing it for a laugh' and had not realized the distress caused. They offered to tidy the woman's garden and then check each lunchtime to see that no other bins had been tipped over. This offer was welcomed as genuinely helpful and, in a small but significant way, it seemed that school and community relations were restored and strengthened. The principal here ensured that this incident provided an opportunity for learning and a recognition that consequences can be constructive. However, in most schools, most of the time, and particularly in most secondary schools, this does not happen.

Attractive as RA was to school staff, and effective as it generally was in improving the network of relationships across the school, data from secondary schools in particular, revealed a strong and rooted commitment to punishment as a proper response to wrongdoing. Schools have generally been very reluctant to forgo the option to exclude pupils as the sanction of final resort. The next section will consider exclusion from school as illustrative of the ways in which this attitude is central to professional responses to children and young people. The central challenge of RA lies here; in its contrast with the 'taken for granted' structures and systems of discipline and control in schools (McCluskey et al. 2008) which elide consequence and punishment rather than see consequence as an opportunity for new learning.

And as one educational psychologist involved in the introduction of RA noted,

> *There's always the risk that when the going gets tough, restorative is an easy target in any school...you've got a kind of default setting among teachers saying 'well that's all very well but we're not punitive enough, we're not scary enough. The kids aren't frightened of us'.*

'The Will to Punish': Risk and control

A number of commentators (Garland, 2001; Parsons, 2005, 2001; Matthews, 2005) have written about the impetus towards punishment, not just in schools but also in the criminal justice system, and have related this to political and cultural norms;

> *In many countries, the will to punish is deeply embedded. It finds expression most strongly in conservative political environments and their liberal welfare regimes.* (Parsons, 2005, p. 198)

Retribution features strongly in political discourses and decision-making conducted against a background of widespread social inequality, or in Third Way terminology, social exclusion. Levitas (2005) delineates three discourses of social exclusion – moral underclass discourse (MUD), social integrationist discourse (SID) and a redistributive discourse of exclusion (RED) – and argues that, whilst SID has dominated New Labour policy, the co-presence of MUD has ensured an emphasis on changing behaviour, *'...through a mixture of sticks and carrots – manipulation of welfare benefits, sanctions for non-compliance and intensive social work with individuals* Levitas 2005, x). In the preface to the second edition of *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and*

New Labour, Levitas comments that MUD identifies particular groups as a problem for social order and responds with behavioural, and often repressive, solutions to that problem.

This analysis is developed further by Parsons (2005) in critiquing responses to student disaffection in schools. RED approaches are framed by children's rights as articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and are characterized by support, nurture and protection. SID, or Third Way, approaches combine individual and structural solutions but Parsons notes that *within that policy span, there are degrees of generosity and different weights given to deservingness* (Parsons 2005, p.203). MUD is located in school approaches which reward and punish:

> Part of the experience of disruptive behaviour amongst young people in school, is that they are hugely and publicly vilified, so are their parents and family, and so also are those who support them (especially if successful), and the negative consequences can be quite severe. (Parsons 2005, p. 198).

Punitive sanctions, and disciplinary exclusion in particular, have been viewed as contributing to the vilification of young people and their families. Commentators (Munn & Lloyd, 2005; Munn, Cullen, Johnstone & Lloyd, 1997; Munn, Lloyd & Cullen, 2000; McDonald & Thomas, 2003) have written of the personal impact of school exclusion on students and their families. In these studies, parents are reported as experiencing a strong sense of powerlessness and hurt as a result of their child's exclusion. McDonald and Thomas (2003) found that negative experiences of school were intensified when the parents concerned were those of students who were excluded. The parents felt that they had no voice in the processes leading to exclusion and neither did their children. They were unable to influence the dominant discourse of the school and therefore could not effect any change to the power relations within the schooling system. Munn et al. (1997) revealed that exclusion generated mutual distrust between home and school. All students in that study indicated that their exclusion had made their parents angry and there were examples of parents or staff feeling that they had been let down or betrayed by some statement or apparent non-cooperation on the part of the other (Munn et al., 1997, p.6). A key issue for excluded students and their families in these studies was the fairness or otherwise of the exclusion:

> Students were conscious that they got labeled as troublemakers and as a consequence got picked on. Students who came from the 'wrong part of town' perceived teachers as more likely to pick on them for that reason (Munn et al., 1997, p. 5).

Research has consistently demonstrated that disciplinary exclusion has damaging effects on those excluded and that some vulnerable groups are excluded at a disproportionately high rate, further disadvantaging those already marginalized or discriminated against in schools. The disproportionately high exclusion rate, for example, among African-Caribbean students in England and Gypsies/Travellers across the UK (DCSF 2009) is mirrored by the experience of black youth in the USA (Skiba et al., 2006), young Maori in Aoeterea/New Zealand

(Drewery, 2004), Australian Indigenous people (Boersig, 2005) and Canadian Aboriginal people (Rudin, 2005). Research has also indicated that exclusion is ineffective in changing behaviour and, furthermore, that it often fails in its aim to 'send a message' to other students about appropriate behaviour (McCluskey, 2008). However, disciplinary exclusion continues to be a widely used sanction despite this large body of research evidence. Garland (2001, p. 13 - 14) links the persistence of punitive measures in schools to a broader decline in commitment to the rehabilitative ideal and the consequences of that decline for how schools manage, and are seen to manage, student behaviour.

A Risk Society and Restorative Approaches in education

Schools' functioning is challenged by a context characterised as a 'risk society' (Beck, 1992) where the post-school transitions of young people are noted as fragmentary, individualised and risk-laden (Giddens, 1990; Beck, 1992). And in spite of a collapsed youth labour market, traditional sources of inequality remain intact (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007: p.13). How, then, can we understand an adherence to punishment and exclusion in schools in the face of compelling evidence of its failures? What might this tell us about schools in a risk society? Graham has suggested that statements speaking of public education as a vehicle for social justice are often paralleled by those of neo-liberal individualism and conservative politics;

> The latter coagulate to form strategic discursive practices which work to (re)secure dominant relations of power, privileging contemporary cultural norms whilst discursively objectifying particular groups of children as deviant (2006, p.15).

Is it possible that RA represents at one and the same time a 'dangerous discourse' in Foucault's terms, and also a vehicle for social justice; a challenge to professional and policy discourse about behaviour that must therefore be avoided, denied or rejected (Graham 2006) but also an agent of social development and cohesion?

We turn now to examine in closer detail how a Restorative Approach may be seen as both a threat and a possible solution. Some of the main characteristics of a risk society might be summarised as follows: the demise of a concern for welfare, the decline of the rehabilitative ideal as justification for punishment, disconnected communities and disembedded relations, ontological insecurity, increasing individualism, and the new managerialism (Beck, 2003; Giddens, 1990). All of these are seen to coalesce and give rise to an unprecedented and growing sense of fear about the present and even greater fear for an uncertain future. Interestingly, the values and principles of RA discussed earlier often speak directly to these same issues. So, it may be argued that RA has been welcomed in education because it responds to the demise of a concern for welfare and reasserts a notion of teaching as a honourable vocation, tied to ideas about the public good. Similarly, RA may be understood to respond to the decline of the rehabilitative ideal in the way it emphasises a need to seek the re-integration of those who transgress accepted norms and boundaries. It is possible to argue,

too, that RA's clear framework of principles and values may offer certainty in place of ontological insecurity. Furthermore, RA explicitly asserts the need for greater collective responsibility and the valuing of 'local contexts of interaction' (Giddens, 1990) as opposed to the individualisation and pathologising of misbehaviour which often accompany punitive sanctions and disciplinary exclusion policy. Finally, RA may be seen as organic, flexible and responsive to local needs and concerns, in ways which the new managerialism would reject.

If we acknowledge the roots of RA in the criminal justice system and criminology, then perhaps we can also look to current thinking in this field if we wish to understand teachers' fears about loss of power and control; the fear that, as one teacher in the RA evaluation expressed it, RA is '*stealing their strength*'. Recalling again Garland's view that 'policies need to be seen to be tough, smart and popular with the public' (2001, p. 13-14), we may ask in particular about the need for popularity with the public. The voice of the victim has become much more central to decision making in the public sphere in recent years and it is generally assumed that the victim and wider public want 'tough, smart' punishment for those who have caused conflict or harm. However, Doble's work on attitudes to punishment (2002) has revealed that public opinion is more varied and diverse than often assumed. Matthews (2005) notes the much stronger recognition of a need to challenge inter-personal violence in the last 50 years, so that, for example, domestic violence, child abuse, incest and hate crimes have come to be taken much more seriously. Recognition may still not be adequately reflected in conviction rates but it is clear that public attitudes have begun to alter significantly. We may ask then if this shift can serve to support the focus of Restorative Approaches in schools on inter-personal conflict and relationships and may sustain the momentum for RA? If the public is the new arbiter then might not this have an unexpected and humanising impact?

However, in a risk society schools will continue to be dominated by concerns about security and containment of risk and danger. In this context, openness to others may be a danger and strength defined as control of risk. Notions of democracy and of the school as a site of transformation are set aside. It seems likely, then, that the intertwining of the aims of RA and the fears of a risk society provide, in equal measure, reasons for its possible expansion or rejection.

Conclusion

Policy and school responses have been driven in two different directions: by welfare on the one hand and by the will to punish on the other. Broader pressures within society mean that the will to punish may be understood as the reification of schools' attempt to impose order on chaos, and control over risk. RA has been welcomed because it seems to answer the need for change based on hope, and effective action based on humanising notions of justice and community. However, the very reasons for its popularity and success are also the reasons its expansion is now in the balance.

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